

Judges VI—I Samuel XVIII.

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THE PEOPLE'S BIBLE:

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BY

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THE BOOK OF JUDGES

(Continued).

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we would rest in thee. Thou hast welcomed us to thy rest, and made us, in promise, sharers of thy feast. The Lord will bless his people with peace, yea, with peace that passeth understanding. Thou dost cause men to possess their souls in peace and confidence when they look unto the Lord and set their expectation eagerly upon him. We have said unto our souls, Look unto the hills whence cometh your help: your help cometh from the Lord which made heaven and earth. Thus the heaven and the earth have become images to us of thy greatness, wisdom, goodness, and continual superintendence; and thus through heaven and earth we have found the living God who made them both. All things tell of thy power, and all things sing of thy love. Why should man be silent? His should be the loudest, sweetest voice of all. Let the people praise thee, O God; yea, let all the people praise thee; let the time of silence now past more than suffice, and let the time of singing, and rejoicing, and testifying, come in upon us like a new year. Truly thy mercies deserve our songs. We will sing of mercy, and of judgment: for is not thy judgment a mercy? and is not thy mercy a judgment? art thou not continually looking upon us through the cloud, and blessing us every day with sunlight? We would join the innumerable company of angels in praising God. We would think of the great host in heavenly places joining the hymn of adoration and thankfulness; we would unite in the great and solemn praise, and be as glad as earth will permit its children to be amid its night and winter and cold. We praise thee for a day that is all thine own: the four-and-twenty hours are four-and-twenty jewels; we bless thee for a house that is all thine own, built upon a sure foundation, rearing itself towards heaven, excluding all profanity, offering hospitality to all necessity; and we bless thee for a book that is all thine own, written as it were with thine own finger, having in it gospels from heaven infinite as the love of God and grand as his glory: may we have the seeing eye, the understanding heart, that, beholding the writing, we may comprehend the meaning, and then proceed to live it over again in useful and happy life. We desire that our religious aspirations may grow in number, in intensity, in loftiness; may our whole character be lifted up by their energy, so that our citizenship may be no longer upon earth,

but already in heaven. Thy care of us, who can doubt? The very hairs of our head are all numbered. If for a moment we distrust thee, it is that we may pray some nobler prayer, because of contrition and the heart-break of penitent sorrow; if we have turned from the Lord, we will come back again, renewed, stronger than ever in faith, tenderer than ever in love. Oh heal our backslidings, and love us freely. Thou knowest our life, for thou didst make it. We do not know what it is. We suffer it, and are afraid of it; for a moment we enjoy it, as we might enjoy an angel's presence, but all our joy is troubled by a distant and speechless fear, and we say, This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven; and our pulse is as the beat of God's eternity within us. Help us through our life to know somewhat of thine; enable us to know through our hearts somewhat of God's love: then shall our life be profitable, and shall help itself to higher uses because to higher devotion. We pray for one another. The Lord's blessing be upon us every one. Thou hast a portion of meat for each in thy house; thou wilt not send any empty away; if our hunger is great, thy resources are greater still. Blessed are they that hunger: behold, our very necessity is turned into a blessing; our capacity to receive is the measure of our capacity to enjoy. O that we might praise the Lord every day—that we might know that all our time may become sabbatic, restful—a period of peace, an anticipation of everlasting tranquillity! Help us to live out the few more days that remain: they come and go so quickly we can hardly number them; between the sunrise and the sunset there is so brief a time, hardly an opportunity to breathe. May we know the measure of our days, and knowing that, may we redeem the time, buying up every opportunity eagerly, and using it as a trust from heaven. Guide all who need special guidance. Show men where the lock is they cannot find, and when they have found it and cannot open it, put the key into their hands. Send light upon those whose way is wrapped in darkness. Speak a word in season to him that is weary; show the weeper that his tears are but for a time and may be the precursors of joy. Help those who are called to carry the burdens of others, who think about them until they are weary—until their wonder becomes a distress, and their solicitude an intolerable pain. We pray for those in trouble on the sea. We pray for those in trouble because of bodily weakness. We pray that in houses where Sorrow has long been the one guest he may this day flee away. As for our sin, we bring it to the cross: the blood of Jesus Christ is the answer of God to the sin of man. Help us to believe in Jesus, to trust in the Son of God, to give up all hope in ourselves, and to find all satisfaction in Christ. Amen.

Judges vi.-viii.

GIDEON.

AT the close of the song of Deborah "the land had rest forty years." The sixth chapter begins with the usual black line:—"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord." These comings and goings of evil in human history seem

to be fated. Men never get so clear away from evil as never to come back again to it; at any moment the course of life may be reversed, and the altar, the vow, the song, and the prayer may be forgotten like vanished summers. This makes the reading of human history a weary toil. We have only to turn over a leaf, and the saints who have been singing are as active as ever in evil. It would be difficult to believe this if we did not know it to be true. This Bible-history is indeed our own history written before the time. Our life seems to be spent upon a short ladder, in going up, in coming down: in going up to pray, in coming down to sin, and drying the tears of penitence; and climbing again, and then coming down; miles short of heaven. The weariness is not in the literature—it is in the fact. We are many men: when we would do good, evil is present with us; when we would do evil, the angel looks at us and reproaches our purpose. The history of Israel is the history of the world. Israel was given over to the hand of the Midianites seven years. This was not, as in the former case, an oppression; it was an attack. In our last study we saw Israel oppressed; here we see a foreign invasion, crowding upon the land inhabited by Israel. Whether in this way or in that, God will not let the battle end until he has punished evil and destroyed it. He is continuing the same policy now. Seated in the heavens, he is watching the earth as if it were the only world he had,—blessing the good, punishing the evil, threatening everything that is of another nature than his own, and keeping perdition for those only who must inevitably be lost. In the olden times there were oppressions, invasions, assaults, and the like; to-day Providence seems to be operating by subtler methods, but always operating to the same end: to punish the evil, and bless the good. A very vivid picture is given of the state of Israel in chapter vi. 2. Israel was dwelling in “the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds.” The proud and princely Israel was burrowing in the torrent gullies, instead of building cities that should have lifted their towers and spires like ascending psalms to the approving heavens. Think of it well! It is the same to-day. Men who might have been in the thoroughfare are hidden away in some distressing obscurity. Men who ought to have been foremost are left so far behind

they can hardly be seen,—dim spectres in the far-away distance. The Midianites were coming up like locusts. No sooner did the Israelites sow their seed than the Midianites had their eye upon it; and it was only by strategy, cunning almost surpassingly human, that Israel could save a handful of corn for itself. Israel was “impoverished.” A very remarkable word is that. It means that they were like a door swinging on broken hinges. Israel, the redeemed people, Israel without whom there might have been no history, Israel had so sinned as to be at last like a door swinging on hinges that were broken: the door could not be shut, the door was no security, the door was a perpetual irony, yea, a daily reproach and taunt. There is a poverty that is the result of what we call misfortune; that is to be pitied and to be assisted: there is a poverty that is only the social and punitive side of sin; that is to be recognised as such—a black blot on the snow of God’s holiness, a sad brand on the righteousness of things. Or the figure may be changed, for it is a double one. Israel was like a sear leaf, just hanging by one frail thread to the branch, all the juice gone, all the beautiful green dead for ever, all possibility of fruitfulness exhausted; and there hung great Israel, a leaf—sear, yellow, dead, just hanging to drop! We must realise this condition of things before we can understand the arduousness of the mission of Gideon. If we do not understand the situation we cannot understand Gideon’s distress, hesitation, hopelessness. The times were out of joint. All things beautiful were dead. The whole time was given over to idolatry. There was but one man who kept to the true faith, and he seemed to worship in secret; he alone was not swallowed up in the great idolatrous passion; his father had gone religiously astray, but he himself still thought of old histories, and had in him flickering, but, oh, quite dyingly, some hope of returning faith.

Then came the inevitable “cry”:—“The children of Israel cried unto the Lord” (vi. 6). It was a mean prayer. Some cries must not be answered; they are unworthy screams or utterances of selfish desire. The Lord will not be too critical about these “cries,” for who then could stand before him and hope for any thing from his hand? What prayer is there worth being heard, not to say worth being answered? Search it, probe it,

and what is it but religious selfishness—a plea for self? But men must pray as best they can. We cannot expect perfect prayers from imperfect men. In the cry there may be something which God can hear to which he will make response. But prayers are not answered, because they are not prayers; they are self-excuses, self-pleadings, desires inspired by selfishness: so they are narrow, shortsighted, out of the rhythm of the music of the universe, notes that cannot be smoothed into the general utterance of the divine purpose; they may do the suppliant good by heightening his veneration or exciting within him some inexpressible desires, but as words they fall back again like birds whose wings have been broken.

Israel cried unto the Lord. What was the divine answer to that cry? It was a prophet. Jewish legend says it was Phinehas, son of Eleazar. The prayer was answered by a man:—"The Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel" (vi. 8). A "prophet" is a teacher, a man who sees the largest relations of things, one who lives above the cloud and can see what is going on underneath it; a seer, a man of penetrating vision, a man whose eyes are within, and from whom God has hidden nothing of wisdom, grace, purpose, and issue. The age must be prepared for its prophets. When the age is haughty, self-contented, self-idolatrous, prophets go for nothing; they are the object of sneering remark; they may be caricatured, they may be turned into food for merriment; but when the age becomes like a door swinging on broken hinges, or like a sear and yellow leaf when all hope has died out of it, then men ask if there be not a prophet, or one who can pray—a seer who can penetrate beyond appearances and discover germs of life or hints of hope? It was so now. The prophet came, and delivered a judicial speech:—

"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land; and I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites [the Amorites were the highlanders of Palestine, and as they were the strongest of all the Canaanitish tribes they are often spoken of as representing or including the whole of them], in whose land ye dwell: but ye have not obeyed my voice" (vi. 8-10).

Here you find a reminder,—that is to say, a reference to history.

Memory was awakened and turned upon the days that had gone. God works through recollection. Marvellous are the miracles which God works by the power of memory : memory goes back, and brings to mind things forgotten, uses them in the light of to-day, observes their action upon the circumstances which make up the immediate present ; and oftentimes a man needs no hotter hell than an awakened and stimulated memory. The recollection was followed by a reproof:—"But ye have not obeyed my voice," saying in effect: I have not changed ; I was continuing the line ; my purpose was one of deliverance and success and honour for Israel, but ye failed in obedience : first you became reluctant, hesitant, then weary, then you complained of monotony, then you said the yoke galled your shoulders, then you fell clean away, then you built Asherah and worshipped Baal ; this is the reason of all that has come upon you ; blame yourselves : for men who fall away from the road of obedience fail of the heaven of blessedness.

All this is intelligible. We have been accustomed to these reminding and accusing voices ourselves, and we do not hear in them anything that startles our reason or taxes our faith. Now the prophet is succeeded by an angel. A most mysterious instance occurs, challenging our faith in its loftiest moods. Gideon was threshing wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites. He was in a little sheltered corner, not daring to use a flail, perhaps, lest the beat of it should attract the attention of some listening Midianite ; Gideon was almost rubbing the wheat between his hands. He was in a little cave rather than in a winepress, which is hardly the literal translation. He was in a corner by himself, rubbing out the wheat which he had industriously sown, painfully watched, and honestly gathered. It was weary work for Gideon. He felt that he was a prisoner, almost stealing his own bread. This is not unknown to ourselves. Men sometimes have to hide their food from their own relations. Some men dare not even seem to be prosperous, because they know what havoc would be wrought by those who have been watching their honourable and successful labours. Men sometimes have to hide themselves from their own flesh, and to rub out their little handful of wheat behind some sheltering crag. Some men are bound to look poor, because they know they would

be fleeced and robbed. Is that not strictly according to our own personal experience? This is the picture presented by the position and action of Gideon [hewer]: a hidden man, doing an honest work in the quietest possible way, only thankful if he can get his wheat turned into bread to satisfy his hunger. Watch Gideon, the one religious man of the place and time. If any one were to come from heaven now, he would come to Gideon. Like descends upon like. "And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah [in Western Manasseh], that pertaineth unto Joash the Abi-ezrite." For a time the angel was silent. How will he speak to a weary man? He will say to him: Poor laden one, this is sad work for Israel; poor weary Gideon, I am sorry for thee in my heart; Gideon, thou shouldst have been out in the open air swinging thy flail and separating the chaff from the wheat right cheerfully and hopefully—poor Gideon! Such sympathy would have overborne the man; it would have been the one drop that would have made the cup of his sorrow overflow. No, there must be sharp reaction; a note must be struck that will awaken the man wholly: he must not continue his dream-trouble, he must have his sleep driven away. What said the angel? "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." The speech seemed to be ironical. Gideon had about him the look as to weariness of a man who was exhausted. But he was a king, and he had a kingly presence, a face that only needed to be awakened to answer the angel's own in the likeness of kinship. There was no fairer man than Gideon in all the land; the make of him was a miracle of God. When he stretched himself right out to his full compass and looked his best self, one could understand how it was that he had "faithful among the faithless been," and had kept Jehovah's altar even amid the riot of the Baal-worshippers. Who shall say there is no kinship between angels and men? Who has wisdom enough to declare that there is no connection between the spiritual life or lives of the universe? It is not only a higher faith but a nobler reason which would say: All we, men, women, children, angels, spirits of the blessed, are one, warmed with one fire, radiant with one glory, expectant of one destiny. We cannot settle anything about this angel that is definite and final. What do we know that is

at all of the nature of counterpart? We know something about unexpected meetings, strangers speaking to us, and yet so speaking that we know them,—speaking to us in our mother tongue, speaking to us words which we have wanted to hear but dare scarcely speak to ourselves; people making beginnings which have had happy endings;—that we know right well. We know something of unforeseen opportunities: the cloud has suddenly opened, and we have seen where we were. Clouds often do open quite suddenly. We have seen the mariner watching for the sun for days: the mariner is ready, his glass is in his hand; if there be but one little rift in that great cloud, he will avail himself of the opportunity to know where the sun is that he may know where his ship is. A rift has come, a sudden chance; it was but a moment, a glimpse, but in that moment there was communication between earth and heaven. So far we are upon familiar ground. We know something of unaccountable impressions also; and sometimes we utter prayers that angels might have inspired, for the prayers have surprised ourselves and made sudden Sabbath in the midst of the tumultuous week. If then we know something of unexpected meetings, unforeseen opportunities, and unaccountable impressions, we seem to be not far from the angel vision, the angel touch.

When Gideon heard the angel's message, he said, in a tone we cannot reproduce, a tone made credulous by incredulity, yet with some resonance of strength in its very halting and shaking,—a tone representing a strange struggle between hopelessness and faith, experience and possibility,—“Oh, sir”—for the term Gideon used in the first instance was but a term of courtesy and not a title of religious veneration—“Oh, sir, if the Lord be with us”—but the angel did not say so; the angel said “thee.” Who can listen critically? Who can distinguish between person and number in the grammar of an angel?—

“Oh, sir, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? [see Deut. xxi. 17] and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites” (vi. 13).

It was a right answer so far. It was better that Gideon should know the exact circumstances. “To know ourselves diseased is.

half the cure." Gideon must not have any false hopes. He must not be taking up any broken splinters of wood and saying: These splinters will be swords which we shall thrust through the bows of the enemy. It is well that he is driven into obscurity, that he is made to do his work with the utmost quietness, that he is compelled to act almost as a thief on the threshold of his own house. To be down so far is to be in that darkness which oft precedes the dawn.

What did the angel do? The angel did two things. (1) He "looked." Who can interpret that word? Some biblical words must remain without interpretation. Sometimes in translating books from foreign languages into our own we are obliged to quote certain words and let them remain untranslated; we hover over them, point to them, give clumsy paraphrases of their possible meaning, but think it better after all to set down the word itself, for it has no equivalent in our own language. It must be so with this word "look." That look begat attention, inspired confidence, elevated thought, stimulated veneration, and *looked* Gideon into a new man. There are looks which do so. There is one look which is yet to do this in all the fulness of its meaning: the day is to come when we shall be like Christ, for we shall see him as he is. These are spiritual looks that we read of in the Old Testament, and that we have experience of in the current of our own lives. (2) The angel, however, not only looked but "said"—changed his tone, used human speech, addressed the man in his mother tongue. He said, "Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?" (vi. 14). But Gideon was astounded, and said in effect: Impossible—

"Oh, my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? behold, my family [my thousand] is poor [the meanest] in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house" (vi. 15).

This is quite in the line of biblical history. Sarah "laughed" when the angel said that she should be the mother of one who should be supreme in history; Moses was shocked when he was told that he, a wandering, stammering shepherd, should face the Pharaohs of Egypt and demand justice to Israel; Paul was amazed that he should be chosen for great missions of deliverance.

Speaking of Gideon, the quaint commentator Trapp says: "He was well-descended, but had mean thoughts of himself. True worth is modest. Moses had distributed the people into thousands as Alfred did the English into shires, hundreds, and tenths, or tithings, whereof the ancientest were called the tithing men." Such was Gideon's view of himself and his chiliad, or thousand. But there is the accusing and stimulating question: "Have not I sent thee?" accusing men of unfaith in a tone that stimulates them to seize their grandest opportunities. Are there not new births? Are there not vivid realisations? Are there not new selves? Behold, the angel must confirm his own message and vindicate his own revelation.

What is the application of all this to ourselves in addition to what has already been said? Are we not often hopeless? We say Jesus Christ is in a minority. Put down the great leaders of the world's religions, and Jesus Christ must statistically take his place near the bottom of the list. That is the arithmetical condition of affairs to-day. Even if every man in the church be a sound man, yet, reckoning up the sum-total, the figures often sink into insignificance. But are there not these two great lessons lying upon the very face of the history, namely, that we grow in social power as we grow in spiritual consciousness? Just as Gideon saw the angel and was conscious of a divine presence did he grow in social power. He was warmed into a larger self. It is when we see God most clearly that all difficulties vanish from our sight. See God, and you need behold no other sight to make the soul majestic and clothe the life with social beneficence. Fear God, and have no other fear. Be sure that the heavens are with you, then be confident that the harvests of the earth will be gathered even to the last grain of wheat, and the enemy shall not prevail in any degree. Then there is a second lesson lying upon the same line, namely, that we need not be socially great to be spiritually useful. Gideon said, "Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven;" and anything but blessed are they who say, "We are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing,"—knowing not that they are poor, and blind, and miserable, and naked. It is like God to choose the poorest tribe and the poorest

man in the tribe. When did God change that plan? When did he vary that mysterious policy? Is it not that no flesh may glory in his presence? Not many wise, great, mighty, noble are called, but God has chosen the weak things to trouble the strong,—yea, things which are not—things which seem to have no existence—to bring to nought things that are: ghostly ministries operating upon material fortresses, spiritual agencies crumbling down temples in the night-time, mysterious influences rending the mighty and bringing down that which is high.

SELECTED NOTE.

Palestine, which is only about the size of Wales, and was still largely held by the former inhabitants, was subdivided by the Hebrews into many tribal governments, as England in the Saxon period was broken up into Essex, Wessex, Mercia, Kent, Sussex, and several other kingdoms; and was, hence, in constant danger of inroad and subjugation. To the nomadic tribes of the desert, which stretched to the borders of the land on the east and south, the valleys of Gilead and Bashan, and the fertile plains of Central Canaan, were an irresistible temptation, stretching out as they did like paradises of green, before eyes wearied with the yellow sand or dry barrenness of the wilderness. Israel itself, when only so many wandering tribes, had forced a way into these oases, and had held them, and there seemed no reason why other races should not, like them, exchange the desert for a home so fair, at least during the summer and harvest of each year, by overpowering Israel in turn.

The forty years' rest after Deborah's triumph was rudely broken by inroads excited in this hope. A great confederation of the Arab tribes, like that which, at an earlier day, had given the Shepherd Kings to Egypt, poured into Palestine. Midianites, Amalekites, and all "the children of the east," far and near, in countless numbers, with immense trains of camels, and of cattle, and flocks, streamed up the steep wadys from the fords of Jordan, and swept all resistance before them, from Esdraelon, on the north, to Gaza, on the extreme south. No sooner had the fields been sown each year, than these wild hordes reappeared, covering the hill pastures and the fertile valleys, in turn, with their tents; driving off every sheep, or goat, or ox, or ass, they could find, and seizing all hoards of grain they could discover, saved from the few fields that had escaped destruction by their endless flocks and herds. No visitation could be more terrible, for there was neither food nor live stock left in the land. Fire and sword spread terror on every side; desperate resistance by isolated bands of Hebrews only led to the massacre of these brave defenders of their homes, and at last safety and even existence seemed possible only by the population taking refuge in the numerous caves of the hills, and in strongholds on hill tops.—*Geikie*.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, come to us as thou wilt—a great fire, or a great wind, or a still small voice. We shall know thee when thou comest, for we are akin to thee; thou didst make us and put thy name upon us. We are fearfully and wonderfully made; we are a continual surprise unto ourselves: sometimes we are self-afraid; sometimes we are tempted to be as gods. Now we know ourselves to be but men, and we sigh about our frailty, and say we are as a withering leaf, as a speck of dust blown about by the wind, a vapour that cometh for a little time and then vanisheth away; then in some other mood, created by thyself, we lay our hands upon all heaven and claim it as an inheritance in Christ Jesus, saying, This is the meaning of his blood, this is the true interpretation of his Cross,—glory, honour, immortality; service without weariness, worship accompanied by growing knowledge, trust in God untroubled by a doubt. Whether we are in this mood, or that, low down or high up, moaning about our littleness or rejoicing in our spiritual sonship, take not thy Holy Spirit from us: Holy Spirit, dwell with us! As for these varying tempers and conditions of ours, are we not still prisoners of time, bondmen of the flesh? Are we not oppressed by circumstances we cannot control? But of all these we shall presently be rid, and then we shall claim thy great creation for the development of our powers, for the continuance and consummation of our worship. For all high religious feeling we bless thee; for all sweet Christian hope we thank thee: whilst the angel of hope shines within us and sings its sweet song of heaven, we know nothing of death or of restraint or of littleness; we are already in the celestial world mingling companionlike with the angels. Read thy book to us thyself, with thine own voice, in thine own tone, and the tone shall be explanation: we shall know what thou meanest when we hear thine own voice. Above all things give to us the seeing eye, the hearing ear, and the understanding heart, when we come into the sanctuary of revelation, lest we exalt ourselves and say our own right-hand hath gotten us what spiritual prey we have: rather would we say, This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes,—is not his love a continual wonder? Is not his grace a perpetual revelation? Hold us, Mighty One, to-day and to-morrow, and on the third day perfect us. Amen.

Judges vi.-viii.

GIDEON.—(*Continued.*)

WHEN the angel “looked” at Gideon the good man’s heart was troubled, and yet his hope was revived. His faith went so far that he would submit to receive some test and proof

that the angel was in very deed the messenger of God. It is something to have got so far along the road of the better land; anything in this direction is better than deafness, blindness, and utter indifference. Gideon said, "If now I have found grace in thy sight, then show me a sign that thou talkest with me" (vi. 17). According to the laws of Oriental hospitality, Gideon withdrew to prepare refreshment for his wondrous visitor:—"Depart not hence, I pray thee, until I come unto thee, and bring forth my present, and set it before thee." And the angel said, "I will tarry until thou come again." "Gideon went in, and made ready a kid, and unleavened cakes of an ephah of flour:"—unleavened bread being more easily-prepared than any other—"the flesh he put in a basket, and he put the broth in a pot, and brought it out unto him under the oak, and presented it." The angel said, "Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth." And Gideon did so.

"Then the angel of the Lord put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the Lord departed out of his sight" (vi. 21).

It was enough. It was the beginning of lasting and all-sufficient comfort.

Now there came a practical test to be applied to Gideon. Sooner or later that test comes to every man. If we put God to the test, what if God should in his turn put us also upon our trial? The test to which Gideon was about to be put was a practical one. As the foreign invasion of Midian was traceable to Israel's evil-doing, so the beginning of the divine deliverance must be moral, spiritual, and religious. That same night the Lord said to Gideon: Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, attach it to the altar of Baal by rope or iron, and drag it down. That was a negative beginning. We must get down the old altar before we put up the new one. "And"—when thou hast done this—

"build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place [build an altar with the wood laid in order]; and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down" (vi. 26).

The grove or Asherah was an image of nature-worship, a huge piece of clumsily-carved wood set up beside the altar : so the altar and the Asherah, or grove, must be cleansed out. Nothing could be done until the religious distemper had been healed.

Gideon made one reservation. We do not wonder that he should have done so. He said, in effect : I cannot do this in the daytime ; I will do it by night.—Who can blame him ? Who will call him coward ? It was a natural device. Men cannot be courageous all at once. Some men need to be trained and nursed into courage ; be gentle with them, patient and hopeful,—who can spring into lionhood all in one sudden moment ? “Gideon took ten men of his own,” rather than “ten men of his servants,” and pulled down Baal’s altar by night. When night gives up her history, it may be found that many a man has attempted to begin a better life under the cover of darkness. We should not taunt men for want of boldness in spiritual things ; sometimes they are bolder than we have imagined them to be : they may even have attempted to pray aloud when no one was present. That is a trial of a man’s spiritual sincerity. It is not every man who can listen to his own voice in prayer and continue the supplication with any composure. A man’s first audible prayer might smite himself down as by a great thunder-stroke : the voice seems so loud, the exercise so audacious ; it is as if the universe had halted to hear the new appeal. Who shall say that men who are dumb in church have not tried in darkness and in loneliness to sing some little hymn of praise when they were quite unheard ? Who knows what papers have been written, what plans of battle have been drawn up, at night-time, wherein men said they would certainly begin at this point, or at that point, to renounce a companionship, to change a custom, to release themselves from the tyranny of a habit : next time they would say No to the invitation which sought to seduce them to evil-doing. Who is not courageous when he is alone ? Who is not most eloquent when there is none to hear him ? We must not, therefore, fall foul upon the memory of Gideon and charge him with want of courage.

But the morning came. What the city then saw ! The cathedral, so to say, was pulled down ! When the men of the city

arose early in the morning they missed the altar and the Asherah, "and they said to one another, Who hath done this thing?" And inquiry resulted in the information that Gideon the son of Joash had done it.

"Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son, that he may die: because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it" (vi. 30).

Joash was not a born Baal-worshipper; the foreign religion sat uneasily upon him. He had inwardly no great respect for Baal; outwardly he was addicted to his worship, but really he had serious misgivings about Baal's godhead. What if all idolators be afflicted with the same scepticism? Scepticism does not grow in the Church with relation to the true God alone; unbelievers in the true religion have scepticism often with regard to their own: they cannot tell what to make of their dumb gods; they have great philosophies about them, but no direct consequence comes of it all; so when an assault is made upon them the resistance is but reluctant or careless. Joash was a wise man; he said: Men of the city, hear me: my son has torn down the altar of Baal; if Baal be a god in very deed let him avenge the wrong himself; do not you interfere as to Baal's sovereignty and godhead: in so far as Baal is a true god he will see to it that the man who insulted his altar shall be punished for his sacrilege and audacity. The men thought this was a good answer, and they accepted it. This is the challenge of the God of the Bible. God is always challenging the false gods to come forward and show what they can do. God mocks them, taunts them, tells them they are nothing,—says they are things made out of iron and stone and wood, and not a single thought is in their carved heads. This is the challenge of Elijah; said he, "The God that answereth by fire, let him be God," whatever his name be; this is not a test of names, forms, ceremonies, dogmas: if Baal be God, let us all worship him, and if the Lord be God, let us bow down in adoration before him:—"the God that answereth by fire, let him be God." The position taken up by Joash is the position we should all take up with regard to religious things. Let God defend himself. The Christian religion is never so humiliated as when men attempt to defend it. God needeth not to be ministered unto by men's hands; nor does he require the

patronage of trained intellect and swift and eager mind. God is continually vindicating himself in his providence. God's appeal is: Look at the world; look at it in great breadths of time; not in a handful of days, or in a nameable measure of months, but look at it in the light of centuries; give yourselves field of vision enough; look at the distribution of men, and the distribution of all natural products; consider the occasion well: see what boundaries are set, see what issues are inevitable, observe how ambition is cut in two at a certain point, and must begin again to raise its shattered head; watch all the ebb and flow of civilisation; observe keenly as well as widely; and if providence be not its own vindication, it is useless for any man, however swift of thought or copious in expression, to attempt to vindicate what the facts themselves do not support. Christian teaching will be strong in proportion as it takes this ground. We are not engaged in matters that can be settled by words. We look abroad and see a law operating—a law of restraint, a law of culture, a law of rewards and punishments; we try to check it, modify it, avert it, but it comes on with quiet irresistibleness—an infinite force: who can ascend beyond a certain height? or who can descend without being suffocated? Who can stretch himself out so as to touch the horizon? and who has not chafed as Job chafed when he said, "Am I a sea, or a whale, that thou settest a watch over me?" If a man would take this wide vision, and bring into focus all these infinite relations, let him look carefully at his own life; let him, as it were, write his own story in his own language, and see how the chapters fall into happy sequence. See what training the man has had, what narrow escapes, what afflictions, what deliverances,—how disappointments have been turned into the roots of prosperity, and how the grim discouraging negative has been the beginning of boldest and most successful endeavour; and when the reviewer has concluded his retrospect, let him say if he can, "All this was of chance, and luck, and incalculable fortune."

Gideon, however, was punished by the people in some degree. The people must interfere a little, even in the case of avenging insults offered to Baal. So they called Gideon by a new name,—they called him "Jerubbaal." The least one can do is to give a reformer a nickname. If we may not smite him, we may at

least throw some appellation at him which we hope the enemy will take up and use as a sting or a thong. So Gideon was called Jerubbaal—literally, “Baal’s antagonist”: let Baal strive, let Baal take up his own cause; Gideon is the man who has defied the gods. That was not a severe punishment for the beginning of a revolution. The name itself was taken up afterwards and sanctified. There is nothing the enemy can do that God cannot turn into happy issues.

Now came the open conflict :—

“Then all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over, and pitched in the valley of Jezreel” (vi. 33).

They were there first. They said, They will be well off who are soonest in the field. What had Gideon to present in reply to this tremendous muster? The story reads well at this point: “But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon,” and he was a thousand men in himself. Inspired, he knew no fear; the tabernacle of the living God, he trembled not before the wind and the tempest. We need inspired men, mad men, enthusiasts, men who know not whether they are fasting or feasting, men who use the world as not abusing it, who hold every thing lightly but their trust from the living God. Gideon “blew a trumpet; and Abi-ezer”—his little flock—“was gathered after him. And he sent messengers throughout all Manasseh”—the people of the tribe—“who also was gathered after him: and he sent messengers unto Asher”—who once proved faithless—“and unto Zebulun, and unto Naphtali”—who had won immortal fame in the battle last fought by Israel—“and they came up to meet them” (vi. 34, 35). Spiritual endowment is power. It is of no consequence how many swords the Church has if it has not the living God: “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword, shall perish with the sword.” Christ’s kingdom is not of this world: it is a kingdom of thought, feeling, love, sacrifice; be true to that spirit, and none can stand before you.

Now Gideon became afraid again, and must therefore be encouraged by another sign from heaven. We must not blame him. He is not the less earnest that he wants to be assured that he is right. Gideon invented a little test for God :—

"Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said" (vi. 37).

Did God reply? God accommodated himself to human weakness as he has always done. Gideon arose early in the morning, "and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water" (vi. 38). ["Wool, as a good radiator of heat, would, under ordinary conditions, receive a plentiful deposit of dew, but so would the surrounding grass and soil. The second miracle was still more remarkable, inferior radiators receiving dew, when a better radiator, wool, remained dry."] Gideon was half persuaded: Now, said he, if the reverse process can be completed, I shall be strong in faith, giving glory to God:—

"Let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece; let it now be dry only upon the fleece and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground" (vi. 39, 40).

["The double sign in connection with the fleece, which Gideon asked of God, is an illustration of a tendency in him to ask for signs: and nothing could be more ingenious, nothing more satisfactory, than the alternate wetting by dew of the fleece and of the whole ground. Possibly he was led to use such boldness in repeated pleadings with God, by the example of Abraham's repeated requests when interceding for Sodom (Gen. xviii. 23-33). And he may have asked for the dew first to concentrate on the fleece, then to spread out over the ground, as he saw how the grace bestowed first upon himself, was spreading out over Israel." —*Douglas.*]

We may not set these fancy tests. They were proper enough at the time when Gideon applied them. The day was not then so far advanced; it was quite early morning, grey twilight, and men did not see clearly, so they asked for much assistance to their vision; and God graciously answered them. Even in apostolic days the freak of the lottery was tried, and we hear but little of the happy consequences which flowed from the adventure. We have nothing to do with putting tests for God now. Why? It would seem a natural and beautiful thing to say, as Gideon

said, If the fleece be wet, or if all the earth be wet, and the fleece be dry, then God is with me, and the right way is open before mine eyes. Why may we not submit God to these tests? because the day is far advanced. This is the age of the Spirit, the age of true spiritual or religious faith. We have now to be guided by those inward and spiritual convictions which often have no words for their adequate and precise expression. We are to be students of providence. Providence itself is a succession of trials, tests, proofs. We are to see how things go, to watch their origin, sequence, consummation. We are to get rid of the superstition that life is a series of isolated incidents. Instead of being right in this particular case, or that, we ourselves are to be right, and all these things shall be regulated for us. The man who is anxious to know merely detailed right has not entered into the Spirit of Christ. He is a man who would keep a book regarding himself, and separate or distribute his life into independent lines and items. That is the Baal we must cast down,—the Baal of being right in instances, in mere details, and writing a little maxim-bible of our own. What, then, is the great aim of Providence to-day? To make right *men*, to create new and clean hearts and spirits, to make the *soul* right. Is that represented to us in any formal, quotable words? Surely:—"Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Expand that thought, and what happens but this great philosophy of life, namely: Be right in your soul, be right in your purpose, have a single eye, do not be playing a double game; "do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God;" and as for the details of this opening life, they will fall into great laws of divine Providence, and will be ministers of grace to the trusting soul. What an insidious sophism lurks in this thinking, namely, that if we could have lotteries by which to test individual actions we could not go wrong. So long as you are meddling with individual actions, and trying to be guided by a kind of travelling time-bill, you cannot be right. Here is the distinctive glory of Christ's religion. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The man does not say, What shall I eat; what shall I drink; wherewithal shall I be clothed; what shall I do to-morrow; and on the

second day how shall I be occupied ; and in what spirit shall I encounter such and such a possible occasion ? That is to live a little life,—to split up, and separate, and individualise, and to act cleverly, not religiously. Life is not to be a system of scheming, managing, arranging, balancing, outwitting those who are half-blind, outrunning those who are cripples or unable to run ; life is a religion, a consecration, a spiritual sacrifice, a continual living in the sight and fear and love of God ; that being granted, all the rest comes in musical sequence, everything else comes and goes by a rhythm divine in its swing and throb. Foolish are the men who want to be right in particular instances, who desire above all things not to be outwitted on set occasions. There was a time in human history when such desires were natural and wholly seasonable, but that time is not now ; for Christ is amongst us, and says to us : Children, be the children of your Father in heaven ; be ye holy, as your Father in heaven is holy ; be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect ; trust your Father, little flock ; be not disheartened ; live in your Father's good pleasure : seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all details will settle themselves. Why, who would kindle a little fire in his own field to dissolve the snow, and say he will have at least a little garden there ? Is the great snow to be broken up into patches in that way, and are we to have little summers and little forces of nature, and little clever attempts to grow something under the most discouraging circumstances ? Do not interfere with God's law in that way. God will send a south wind and a warm sun, and the snow will flee away. There must be a great astronomic movement—a high, mighty far-reaching movement, a change of atmosphere : and that will drive back the winter, and in due time “throw a primrose on the bank in pledge of victory.” So must it be with the winter-bound heart of man. It is not by lighting little fires here and there so as to warm great feeling, or create a momentary benevolence, or rise into a temporary ecstasy ; the Spirit of the living God must descend upon the whole man, must take possession of the heart ; and, reigning there, ruling there, working out the mystery of inspiration there, all the life shall bud and blossom, and be gracious and hospitable as summer. This is the better plan ; this is the grander philosophy of life. We do not pronounce

judgment upon Gideon in any adverse terms; he did what he could. God smiled upon his infantile endeavours; the great day of spiritual inspiration had not then fully come. Gideon's purpose was to know whether God was with him. The purpose is eternal—the method of discovery was temporary. Let us also know whether God is with us, not in this particular case, or in that particular case, but whether God is with us in very deed within, ruling the mind, and heart, and will, and judgment of the whole soul; and then if we go downhill, it will be downhill on the highlands: even the valleys are lifted up in these great heights; and if we do stumble, we shall rise again—yea, though we fall seven times, the eighth endeavour shall bring us home. He who lives upon any other principle lives a sharper's life,—often very clever, often very skilful, a good deal may be said in defence of it as to particular instances and individual successes, but he is a charlatan, an empiric, an adventurer; he is setting traps for God, and fancy devices wherein to entangle the Eternal. The great life—the grand, true, simple life—is to be in Christ, in God, as to thought, feeling, purpose: then let the days bring with them what they may, all their bringing will be overruled and sanctified, and even our very faults shall help us in our higher education.

SELECTED NOTE.

"Cast down the altar of Baal" (vi. 30).—The word *ba'al*, as it signifies *lord, master*, is a generic term for *god* in many of the Syro-Arabian languages. As the idolatrous nations of that race had several gods, this word, by means of some accessory distinction, became applicable as a name to many different deities. Baal is appropriated to the chief male divinity of the Phœnicians, the principal seat of whose worship was at Tyre. The idolatrous Israelites adopted the worship of this god (almost always in conjunction with that of Ashtoreth) in the period of the Judges (ii. 13); they continued it in the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, kings of Judah (2 Chron. xxviii. 2; 2 Kings xxi. 3); and among the kings of Israel, especially in the reign of Ahab, who, partly through the influence of his wife, the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal, appears to have made a systematic attempt to suppress the worship of God altogether, and to substitute that of Baal in its stead (1 Kings xvi. 31); and in that of Hoshea (2 Kings xvii. 16), although Jehu and Jehoida once severally destroyed the temples and priesthood of the idol (2 Kings x. 18, *sq.*; xi. 18).

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast made the sanctuary a place of explanation : within thy house we understand all that is needful for us to know. Outside of it we cannot tell what things really are ; we are in the midst of tumult and strife and anger ; wrath and malice and bitterness exclude thy presence, but when we come into the house of God we see in the true light, we know somewhat of thy meaning, we are privileged to behold the out-working of thy purposes, and as we look we wonder, and as we wonder we pray, and our prayer speedily becomes a song of praise, because we see that the Lord reigneth and that the end of things is in his hands. Enable us often to come to the sanctuary. Blessed be thy grace for establishing it, so that now we may say, the tabernacle of God is with men upon the earth ; God's house is in the midst of our dwellings. When we come into the sanctuary may we find the spirit of the house there,—the spirit of reverence and love, the spirit that loves the truth and follows after it and will eventually establish it ; and being in the spirit in thy house, may thy book appear to us in all its breadth and lustre : wide as the great heaven, brighter than the sun when he shines in his strength ; and may our hearts be comforted by the messages which they most need ; and if first we must be humbled and chastened, stripped and impoverished, that we may know our right condition, thou wilt not end the process there, but having shown us our blindness and nakedness and wretchedness thou wilt give us fine gold, and ointment wherewith to anoint ourselves, and truth upon truth, until the soul is filled with the riches of Christ. So let it be now and evermore. May the sanctuary be a place of elevation whence we can see afar, and a place of revelation where we can see sights let down from heaven and hear voices meant for our instruction and comfort. To the sanctuary we bring our sin. Here we leave it, because the Cross is here ; we may not—need not—take it back with us ; for the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son cleanseth from all sin. Here let our sin be crucified ; here let our sin be pardoned.

This prayer we pray at the Cross ; and we tarry at the Cross until the answer come. Amen.

Judges vi.-viii.

GIDEON.—(*Continued.*)

THERE are critical words in every life, and critical moments. Everything seems to happen all at once,—a curious sense of suddenness affecting the whole life. The word “then,” with which the first verse of the seventh chapter opens, marks a

critical point of time. How easily the word is written; and how easily said; but all Gideon's life seemed crowded into that ardent moment. So it is with our own lives. We crush the whole life into one day. Or we seem to see for what our whole life has been preparing by the light which shines upon one special moment. The time of battle had come; but the time of battle came in the case of Jerubbaal, as we have seen, after long and singular preparation. All that is happening should be regarded as of the nature of preparation. We should ask ourselves now and again, even amid the monotony of life, What is the meaning of this rest? What is the point of this delay? God always has a purpose, and we ought to find it. Why all this schooling, this long and weary study, this knocking night and day at Wisdom's door? These intellectual inquiries touch the very region of prayer. What is the meaning of all these providences? In all these undulating lines of life read the philosophy and purpose of heaven regarding human service and destiny. Why these sharp trials, these rains of sorrow, these rivers of grief? Why these bereavements, losses, deprivations, disappointments, surprises? Has the tale no end? Is there no point of fire, no final climax? Is it all tumult, change, gain, loss, pleasure, pain,—on and on, and the last pain the greatest,—the pain of saying farewell before dropping into eternal silence? This cannot be. The question, then, should come to every man when he is seeing visions, hearing voices he never heard before, receiving unexpected and startling visits, What is the meaning of it all? This means action: presently the story will open upon the battle chapter. Surely some of us have had preparation enough. Long since we ought to have been in the thick of the fight. Why all this book-reading? Is there room in the crowded memory for one more volume? Surely we may say to some students, Why continue the bent head, the midnight lamp, the vigil out of season? What is the meaning of all this? The battle waits, or the battle might now begin: the world might turn round and ask, Are you not ready now to speak some gospel word, or at least look some look of hope, lifting upon our weariness eyes that might be as revelations and encouragements. It is weary work to watch how long some men are in putting on their armour. It tires the soul to see how long some men

are in whetting the sickle, whilst the white harvest almost withers because of their unaccountable, if not criminal, delay. The critical morning dawned upon the life of Gideon. He took up his new name, having no objection to it. When his fellow-citizens called him Jerubbaal, he said, in effect: So be it: that name expresses my relation to the false god exactly,—namely: “Let Baal strive;” or “Let me be Baal’s antagonist:” I yoke a bullock to the god, and drag him down; now let my father’s advice be accepted, and let Baal defend his own case. It is wonderful to notice how many of these Old Testament people take their new name with fine grace, as if with deep sense of the fitness of the larger appellation. We, too, are called upon to pass into new names, or new categories: have we done so? Have we been called Christians? Or are we hiding the new faith under the old name, so that the people know not that a change has taken place in our title? “Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” Yet some of us have hardly dared to claim and wear the name. If to some there belongs a name of controversy, battle, antagonism, take it up: it suits the times; the world wants warriors. Take the name which God gives you, or which is brought to bear upon you by the order of his providence. When does God give a less name than the old one? He adds a syllable, and thereby adds a destiny: he changes one letter, first or last, and therein changes the course of a lifetime. “Jerubbaal, who is Gideon,” took his place at the head of his people, “rose up early.” When did the great worker ever rise up late? Early-rising is a necessity of divine vocation. There need be no mechanical arrangement about it. The work is terrific, and the worker is straitened until it be accomplished. There is an impatience that is inspired. Gideon and his people “pitched beside the well of Harod,”—that is, beside the well of “trembling,” beside the well of “fear.” It is well to begin at that point. Many a man who has begun his work nervously has turned out at the end to be quite a giant. Take heart; you are indeed now at the well of Harod,—at the waters of fear and trembling,—but if you are there on God’s business, have no vital fear; you may shake off all fear and pray in the church as a child might pray at home, and fight in the field as consciously called of God to do the work of battle. We must not pour contempt

upon men who are nervous, timid, hesitant in their first speech, afraid to pray their first audible prayer. History ought to have taught us a good deal upon such matters. Men who have begun thus have ended in great renown. Everything depends upon our spirit, upon our reliance upon the living God, upon our knowing that the work is not ours but the Lord's.

This would seem to have been the course of the divine thought, for "the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many." They are but thirty-two thousand in all; yet they are too many. But how can they be too many, for the Midianites are a hundred and thirty-five thousand strong? That, said God, is making a human calculation. We get wrong by applying human arithmetic to divine decrees; or we get wrong by trying to measure God's eternity by the tape of our time. He was an inspired man who invented the phrase "for ever and ever." That is the point at which time gives up the race, falls down dead, and lets eternity stand in its nameless mystery. But to-day we will play the arithmetician, and deal in figures and tables and returns audited and well avouched. When will we, can we, learn that all numbering is with the Lord, and that because the battle is his he will fight it as it pleases him? Israel would make a wrong use of numbers, as most men do. Israel would say, "Mine own hand hath saved me: I was thirty-two thousand strong on that memorable day, and that was force enough to slay the Midianitish power." God will stain the pride of all glory. God will not allow any flesh to glory in his presence. If we are gospel preachers, "we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us." Human ambition must be restrained.

The so-called law of cause and effect, which has victimised so many men in the spiritual universe, must be upset and condemned. When the Church comes into this temper we shall hear news of victory: God will surprise his trustful Church with tidings of great joy. Two-and-twenty thousand men returned unto their houses because they were fearful and afraid. Do not condemn this cowardice, for it is the very colour and temper of our own time. Many men are bold the day after the battle;

many have *nearly* said the word of courage, the word of just reproof. Are not the greatest numbers most cowardly? In a sense this is true. If they could fight as a crowd they would be partially courageous: but real fight comes to man by man, assault and answer. So two-and-twenty thousand men said, We had better continue in oppression, in slavery, in loss, than challenge these unequal odds. But the Lord said, "The people are yet too many;" and the number was reduced to three hundred men by a very curious and interesting test, namely, the different methods in which water was taken. Are there no such tests now? We suppose that this test has passed away and settled in venerable history, to be occasionally exhumed and wondered about: the particular instance itself may no longer be literally repeated, but the principle that is in it is the principle which is operating in the very men who deny the accuracy of the literal incident itself. Men are chosen now by curious signs. We do not know how we are chosen to any particular work; but it may be found incidentally that some little unexpected circumstance, of which we took no note or heed, determined our being where we are. Men who want servants, lieutenants, allies, co-operative assistants, are looking round; the people upon whom they are looking may be unaware of the critical inspection, but it is proceeding nevertheless. Those who are looking on say, He walks lazily, his gait is lacking in energy; he will never do for my particular work. Or: See how he walks; what fire there is in him; every action is half a battle; he needs but to be put in the right circumstances, and he will turn out a satisfactory man; or: He talks too much; his speech is without pith or regard to the number of its words; he patters and gossips and is cursed with a detestable fluency: listen; he never ceases, he never pauses, he evidently loves to hear himself chatter,—he will never do. Or: He is an excellent listener; he does not commit himself: observe, he never plunges into anything that he cannot fully grasp and comprehend; he looks more than he speaks; not a word escapes that listener: when he does speak there is marrow in his speech; he is young, but he will get over that disadvantage; he shapes well already. This process is going on through all society. Men are noting one another; seeing whether they lie down upon the ground and devour the water, or whether,

being men in wise haste and under self-control, they lap it, and pass on. The little local incident has changed, but the principle of curious and even eccentric election is operating in all life, and the men who deny the Bible live over again its most curious instances.

Gideon was one of those men who require continual encouragement. It was not enough to say to him once for all, "I will be with thee;" he did not doubt the divine presence: but see how Israel had been weakened, impoverished, crushed, these last seven years by the invasion of the Midianites; see how they dare not thresh their corn in the open field or accessible winepress, but had to beat it out in the concealment of the crags and rocks; observe how Israel had to listen and look to assure himself that no Midianite was looking on before he rubbed out his handful of corn and got it ready for the baking;—then say if a man could instantly become a great religious and courageous character; and then see how loving it was of God to deal with him according to his weakness, to encourage him, little by little to lead him on. Why, this is the Christly spirit: he will not break the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax; he has the tongue of the learned, and can speak a word in season to him that is weary; he will not urge his omnipotence against our nothingness, but will accommodate his approach, and breathe upon us quietly, and send to our sinking spirits a still small voice. So Gideon needed to be encouraged again. The Lord said to him: I have made a man down in the Midianitish camp dream a curious dream; I will so operate upon him that he will begin to talk as it were in a half-sleep: go down and listen. Gideon looked afraid; the Lord noticed the blanched face and said: If thou fear to go down alone, go thou with Phurah thy servant; two may be better than one. This is an anticipation of the time when the Lord sent out his servants "by two and two." Gideon took heart when he was allowed to take a servant with him.

"Then went he down with Phurah his servant unto the outside of the armed [the same word is rendered *harnessed* in Exodus xiii. 18. The probable meaning is *arrayed in divisions*] men that were in the host. And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the children of the east lay along in

the valley like grasshoppers [locusts. Compare Numbers xxii. 4, 5] for multitude; and their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude" (vii. 11-12).

When Gideon came near a man told a dream to his neighbour; he said, "Behold, I dreamed a dream, and, lo, a cake of barley bread"—such bread as Israel has been reduced to, the bread of poverty—"tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along." It is an extraordinary dream; what is the meaning of it? The other man had the faculty of interpretation; he said, "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel." Once let the enemy have within him the fear that the opposing host will succeed, and the battle is won. Battles are lost and won in the soul. The Church has feared, and the Church has lost.

The battle opened. Israel, represented by three hundred men, did according to the instructions of Gideon:—"When I blow with a trumpet, I and all that are with me, then blow ye the trumpets also on every side of all the camp, and say, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon,"—and that will correspond in instructive harmony with the dream which I have overheard; the name of Gideon has entered into the speech of the Midianites; associate that name with this great battle, and say, "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." So the battle opened. "And the three companies blew the trumpets, and brake the pitchers, and held the lamps in their left hands, and the trumpets in their right hands to blow withal: and they cried, The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon;" and as the torches were shaken in the air, for they were torches rather than what we understand as lamps, and as the sound came from every quarter at once, Midian was afraid, and Midian was destroyed. Make the most of yourselves. You are but three hundred, but symbolically you are all heaven. This manner of assaulting the enemy is no dramatic manner, no pretence or affectation; this is a battle which is being fought on divine principles: therefore, if three hundred men seem to be three millions, they *are* such, multiplied by themselves and multiplied by infinity in their symbolical and representative capacity.

Gideon took princes that day, even "Oreb and Zeeb," the

Raven and the Wolf. The heads of the raven and the wolf were brought to Gideon on the other side Jordan,—see him with the one in one hand and the other in the other. It was an old and barbarous plan to bring the head of the enemy to the hand of the conqueror. It is not a thing to be reproduced or countenanced by Christianised civilisation; but it was the ancient mode of warfare, and must be judged by the morality of the age. This is typical. “Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?” He has trodden the winepress alone. He is mighty to save; he is mighty also to destroy. “His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish.” In this faith all Christians live and work, serve and suffer, and, blessed be God, the inspiration is in us also. Men call themselves by symbolical names, as Midian was called “the Raven,” but God’s hand is in the heavens, and the air shall be cleansed of his enemies:—“the Wolf,” but God’s eyes are in the forest and the jungle and the wilderness, and he will destroy the ravenous beast. Men have called themselves by ideal and typical names, as the “Gracchi”—the jackdaws. We respect them under the name of the Gracchi, because we do not know what it means, but when it is understood that the interpretation thereof is “jackdaws” we feel that we ourselves might encounter them in battle. The Aquilini—the eagles. So our great warriors have called themselves bull, and wolf, and lion. All these names have histories behind them; but we can never fight with names only: they must represent realities, spiritual inspirations, moral convictions, gospels we have died for, heavens we have seized with crucified hands; then the battle will go the right way. Enter the fight and always turn your eyes to the blood-stained banner on which is written, as with pen of lightning, The battle is not yours, but God’s. Fighting under that banner and in its spirit, the fight can have but one end—grand, complete, eternal victory.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, evermore be with us; evermore give us the bread of life: evermore keep us within the hollow of thy hand. We have learned to distrust ourselves. We have hewn out to ourselves cisterns, but have found them to be broken cisterns that could hold no water. We have thought to plant gardens and sow fields of our own, and behold thou hast withheld thy sun, and all our efforts have perished in darkness. So now, if thou wilt not disdain so mean an offering, we would, under the drawing of a power not our own turn to thy grace, and offer ourselves in sacrifice unto thee: do thou now accept the oblation and give us answers from heaven. We thought our life would never end, and behold we have come to know that it is but a breath in our nostrils. We said of our strength, It is enduring, and cannot fail; and behold, whilst the boast was upon our lips our juice was dried up and there was no sap in all the life. We all do fade as a leaf. We are but as the wind, blowing for a little time: or a vapour dying upon the breeze. We cannot tell what we are, for there is no language that can set forth our poverty, and feebleness, and littleness; yet, when we come to know thy Son Jesus Christ our Saviour, and by living faith in him enter into the mystery of his being, then are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be, but our hope is that we shall be like our Saviour, for we shall see him as he is. So we are little, and great; worthless, yet all-worthy; children of time, yet sons of immortality. Help us to understand somewhat of this mystery, to accept it, to walk in its spirit, to pray mightily unto God that we may grow in all purity, nobleness, and holy power. Thy hand has been outstretched to us in all goodness; no good thing hast thou withheld from us. If we judge by thy rain we cannot tell the just from the unjust; if we judge by thy sunshine we know not the difference between the good and the evil: for thou art kind unto all, and thy tender mercies are over all thy works; the mercy of the Lord endureth for ever, and to his love there is no measure. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name. We confess our sins, and mourn them with bitterest lamentation, and seek thy pardon at the cross. God forbid that we should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: it is the hope of the sinner; it is the way to heaven; it is the very glory of the divine love. Help us to handle our life with great sagacity, understanding the mystery of it as revealed in thy holy book; may we see its littleness, yet its infinite possibilities; may we judge between that which is for a moment and that which is for ever; as wise builders, may we build upon the rock and not upon the sand; may it be found at last that through apparent folly we have been practising the most solid wisdom, and though

men have imagined that we had forgotten that which is temporal, yet by seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all the lower worlds and their meaner concerns have been put under our dominion. We give one another to thee. We would be wedded unto the Christ of God; we would serve him with all faithfulness, love, sincerity, and hopefulness: may he accept our offering. We bless thee for all good men, whose word is their bond, whose signature is never forsworn, who know what is righteous and do it at the cost of life itself. We thank thee for all patience, as shown in the house, in the business, in the church, in every sphere of life—divine patience, motherly, womanly, Godlike. We ask thee to be with us in all our special troubles and turn them into special joys: may our losses be the beginning of our gains, and through our failing health may we see the meaning of immortality. Guide the blind; save the helpless; give speech unto the silent; and be the friend of the friendless. Thus may we live in thy fear, in thy Spirit, in thy love, triumphing over life, time, space, death, already knowing that our citizenship is in heaven. Amen.

Judges vi.-viii.

GIDEON.—(*Continued.*)

IN the eighth chapter we have quite a gallery of portraits. We may call these allusions to character, aspects, rather than full delineations. Unless we look very vigilantly we shall miss a good deal of the colour and meaning of this panorama, for the action is extremely rapid. You find a character in a line; a history in a sentence; the whole man almost in one trembling or urgent tone. Everything in this chapter is of the nature of condensation. More matter could not be put into this space. Hardly a word could be omitted without interfering with the solid integrity of the composition. He who built this chapter was a master-builder. What fire there is in it; what anger; yea, what zeal; what delay inspired by impatience! thus constituting an almost contradiction in terms. Here is a man too impatient to do what he wants to do at the moment, but he says, I will do it by-and-by; when the greater purpose is accomplished the smaller design shall be fulfilled. But we anticipate. Let us travel the road step by step.

Take Gideon's answer to Ephraim as showing that not only was Gideon a great soldier but a great man. That is the secret of all official greatness—namely, greatness of manhood. There can be no great officer in any sense except as expressive of a

reserve of strength, a great manhood. There can be no great soldier, great statesman, great preacher, great business man, without there being behind all that is official and visible a great wealth of nature, a great fulness of life. The men of Ephraim did chide sharply with Gideon, saying, "Why hast thou served us thus, that thou callest us not, when thou wentest to fight with the Midianites?" We shall see presently that Ephraim was both a bully and a coward. He is proud of having descended from Joseph, and proud of being connected with the illustrious Joshua; but in himself there was more foam than ocean, there was more splutter than divine energy. Ephraim was always finding that he had been left out in the cold. In a page or two we shall see that he met with the man who had the right answer to that foolish self-idolatry. Gideon will reply softly and gently, but Ephraim shall not always have it thus; he will ask this very question again of another man, and we shall see how that sterner man will answer him. Ephraim represents the kind of man who comes in after the battle has been turned to victory and says what he would have done if he had been invited. Ephraim represents the man who is always a day after the fair, a day after the battle,—he who comes in when the sun of prosperity is shining and says that if only he had had an invitation he would have been the first subscriber to the fund, the most liberal supporter of the movement, the most energetic member of the faith. Presently he will tell Jephthah that, and Jephthah will answer him otherwise than Gideon replied. It was well that Gideon,—whose name means "Hewer,"—should show that he was as gifted in the quality of self-control as were his three hundred followers. His answer is intellectually energetic, and in it—far away in it—is just a little suggestion of irony and the kind of flattery which has a sting in it. It was a wonderful answer. Haughty, proud Ephraim apparently could have crushed the Hewer and his three hundred men; so Gideon said: What have I now done in comparison with you? think how little I am! Why, you mis-spend your anger in being at all annoyed by anything that was in my power to do. Is not the gleaning of the grapes of Ephraim better than all the vintage of the house to which I belong? the few odd grapes you leave on the vine, are they not of more value than all the grapes that ever

cluster on the vines of Abi-ezer? It was well to put the inquiry so. There is a skilful use of interrogation. The form of question has been adapted to strange uses. Gideon reminded Ephraim of what had been done, though even that was only done incidentally. Then he asks the other question: And what was I able to do in comparison with you? You are such a great people; if I had asked you to join in a war you might have contemned so insignificant a creature; look how tall you are, and how scarcely visible I am! "Then their anger was abated," showing that it was a bully's anger, and not a hero's. Their anger was abated when they were flattered. Yet this is the soft answer that turneth away wrath. The question well-planted, quite a thorn of a question, yea, a sharp sting; yet Ephraim, being of the mean quality he was, accepted the flattery and felt not the reproach. We almost long for Ephraim to come into contact with the other kind of man. Ephraim finding how this movement ended will try it again. Ephraim looked so well. What he would have done if he had only been invited! We wait for the man who can see through his falsehood and answer it with slaughter.

Was Gideon, then, soft and foolish? Has he lost the pith of his character? Take his treatment of the men of Succoth. Gideon asked that they would give loaves of bread unto the people that followed him, "For," said he, "they be faint." He seemed to ask for the people and not for himself: I am pursuing after kings—give the people loaves of bread that they may be able to keep up with me in this fierce haste. The princes of Succoth took advantage of weary men. There are cruel hearts that can take advantage of the hunger of other men—hearts that can say, Now is our opportunity; whilst they lack bread and are suffering from hunger, now we can vaunt it over them, now we can tread upon them. The princes of Succoth said, Your victory is not yet complete; you have to fight Zebah and Zalmunna before you can say the battle is ended; when Zebah and Zalmunna are in thy hands, then come, and we will give you bread enough; but do not suppose that you have found those whom you are only pursuing. Gideon was instantly fed with a nutriment that made him strong; forgetting his weariness, he said,

"When the Lord hath delivered Zebah and Zalmunna into mine hand, then I will tear your flesh with the thorns of the wilderness and with briers." And he made the same answer to the men of Penuel: "When I come again in peace, I will break down this tower." So we must not argue that because a man gives a civil answer to a violent assault, therefore he is of mean quality, and is craven in spirit, and afraid of that which is high and mighty. The quiet answer is an illustration of self-control; the soft reply, the gracious retort, shows that the heart is trusting in the living God, and not in any accidental strength: they who dwell in the tower of heaven can speak quietly from the window to those who are looking up and who are expressing dislike far down at the base. In quietness possess your souls, and in sweet patience. Never answer fury with fury. The princes of Succoth and the men of Penuel were cold in their cruelty, mocking in their hostility; they were not in red-hot anger, but they were taking advantage of temporary weakness. Such persons were answered with fire red-hot. Gideon was thus a manifold character: a quiet man, few in words, threshing out his corn behind the rock that no Midianite might see him, quietly proceeding about his domestic affairs; suddenly taking fire when the touch from heaven came upon him, and a voice other than human told him he was a "man of valour," right mighty in battle, but most suave and gentle and gracious in the presence of unreasonable men, who did chide with him sharply for what they supposed to be an omission of duty or a breach of courtesy; then flaming up again into the very divinest anger because men refused weak soldiers bread, and mocked pursuers because they appeared to be unable to complete the journey. "I will tear your flesh;" literally, I will thresh your flesh, as he had been found by the prophet and the angel threshing his corn; "I will break down this tower," and those who are in it must take the consequences of its overthrow.

Was Gideon selfishly ambitious? To this inquiry there is a sublime reply. When the men of Israel saw the prowess of Gideon they said, "Rule thou over us, both thou, and thy son, and thy son's son also: for thou hast delivered us from the hand of Midian" (viii. 22). That was his opportunity. All great

prophets and soldiers have had such chances ; John the Baptist had when he was asked if he was " that prophet." Then, everything depended upon his answer ; and he answered, " I am not." The people would have taken Jesus and made him a king " by force," but he stood back from the mob and disdained their crown. " And Gideon said unto them, I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you : the Lord shall rule over you " (viii. 23). There is the real quality of the man. Probe him where you will, you find his motive to be inspired by a consciousness of God's sovereignty and control. Gideon might have been a king, but was not ; and, because he was not, he really was. There are many kingships, some crowned, some uncrowned ; some material, imperial ; some spiritual, intellectual, moral : the crown is *in* the man rather than upon him ; if only upon him, the wind may blow it off, or some fool's hand may suddenly dash it to the ground. Gideon believed in what is known as the Theocracy,—that is, the reign of God,—God's kingship of Israel, God's headship of the Church, God's defence of all faith, truth, righteousness. It is not every man who can start a victorious war so nobly. Gideon lost nothing in the fight, but gained all things. So may we. Life is a battle. Every day has its controversy, its sharp tug, its fierce wrestling, its great conflict—a conflict within or without ; a temptation addressed to the soul, or a fury assailing the estate. How are we to come out of the great combat ; to bring out of the onslaught a clear character, a clean heart, a right spirit, a motive undamaged, and a probity unstained ?—that we may so come out of the clash of arms and the spiritual assault should be our continual prayer. " Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand." Stand therefore, panoplied from head to foot, the left hand as the right, and the eyes fixed now on God, now on the foe.

Was Gideon, then, perfect ? Is he by all these just encomiums removed from competition and enshrined in altitudes absolutely inaccessible ? Is he an historical figure to be almost worshipped ? Is he bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, snared by the same gins and traps, and falling now and again under the same blandishments ? The perfect man, whom we feel to be so per-

fect as to lose touch with our humanity, really would do us more harm than good. Gideon was no perfect man. He had a vulnerable heel; there was a bruise upon him which showed him to be mortal. Having had the offer of the crown and the throne and the rulership that was to be hereditary, Gideon said, No, but "I would desire a request of you." What is that? said Israel cheerfully. I would request "that ye would give me every man the earrings of his prey" (for they had golden earrings, because they were Ishmaelites). Gideon could make some use of these little crescent-shaped ornaments. "And they answered, We will willingly give them. And they spread a garment"—perhaps the very overcoat that Gideon himself wore—"and did cast therein every man the earrings of his prey. And the weight of the golden earrings that he requested was a thousand and seven hundred shekels of gold;" and, being in the giving mood, they said, Give him "ornaments, and collars, and purple raiment that was on the kings of Midian," and add to the store "the chains that were about their camels' necks." We do not blame them. They were royal-hearted in their liberality; therefore they gave with both hands. Gideon had but to make his mind known, and the people who followed him instantly responded with abounding, yea, with redundant generosity. Wherein, then, was the littleness of Gideon or his imperfectness? It was in the use which he made of the golden store: "Gideon made an ephod thereof, and put it in his city, even in Ophrah: and all Israel went thither and whoring after it"—lusting after it, desiring to make an idol of it and worship it—"which thing became a snare unto Gideon, and to his house" (viii. 27). We did not expect this. Yet we might have expected it had we studied human nature closely. The very man who pulls down one idol sets up another. Gideon had an eye for colour. He liked the sleeveless coat of the priest. He noted its beautiful structure, its marvellous adornment, its oracular gems; and he was minded to make an ephod of all the gifts the people had given. This ephod became an idol, a charm, an amulet. It was looked at as if the very spirit of Gideon was in it. He who disestablished the national idol set up an ephod of his own! Alas for human inconsistency! The same Gideon, the man who took one of the bullocks and yoked it to Baal and dragged down the helpless god,

manufactures a little idol of his own ! It was a shame ; and yet it seems to be partly well, for now we can join Gideon at the point of his imperfection ; perhaps we can get further into his character, and pray with as intense an energy, and grasp the eternal with as strong a faith. Take the man in the entirety of his character, in the sum-total of his being, and not in points and phases. Is it not so with all great reformers ? The men who can finance the affairs of Europe can very seldom pay their own private accounts ! The great and mighty reformers who could reconstruct the universe sometimes omit to wash their own hands ! Are we not all human ? Is it not perfectly possible to be both great and small—to have dragged down a god and to have set up an ephod ?

Now surely Israel will be good. Israel has had schooling enough, and the time has now come when Israel will take up the policy of good behaviour, and be honest and true evermore. "Gideon the son of Joash died in a good old age, and was buried in the sepulchre of Joash his father, in Ophrah of the Abi-ezrites" (viii. 32). Now Israel will remember the old man's grave, and never be insincere or faithless any more. The thirty-fourth verse will disillusion us : "And the children of Israel remembered not the Lord their God, who had delivered them out of the hands of all their enemies on every side." Well, they may have gone down theologically, but still they are men. Agnostics claim to be men, and honourable men. History has never been very much on the side of those persons who imagine that theology can be given up and yet morality retained. We are bound to accept the evidence of the ages. What was the case of the children of Israel ? They "remembered not the Lord their God," but they remembered Gideon. They will be kind to his children. They will say, We may have changed our theological views, but we are still men ; we may have left the church, but we are still honourable citizens. The thirty-fifth verse will disenchant us : "Neither shewed they kindness to the house of Jerubbaal, namely, Gideon, according to all the goodness which he had shewed unto Israel." The retirement from the soundly religious point of view is accompanied by lapses of another kind. A man cannot close the Bible and say,

Though I have abandoned that book, yet I am as honourable and true and pure and good as I ever was. If so, then history has been inverted; the facts of the centuries have been proved to be false. A man cannot give up prayer, and give his attention in any profound and enduring sense to the culture of a noble life. A man cannot love his neighbour until he has loved his God. There is logic in the sequence of the commandments: the first, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God;" the second, "and thy neighbour as thyself." It is a very dangerous thing for any of us to attempt to-day, in the face of so vast a body of historical evidence, to say that we will give up the Church, the sanctuary, the altar, the Bible, and be as good as we ever were. It is like the train saying, We will give up the engine, and travel just as easily and swiftly as we ever did. It is like the spring flower saying, I will give up the sun, and be as beautiful, delicate, and fragrant as before. It is like the body saying, I will stop the pendulum of the heart, and be as vigorous, strong, and energetic as I ever was. Do not attempt the risk; do not rush upon the mad adventure. The stream can only run in proportion as the fountain is filled and flowing; the earth is nothing of itself, but, being attached to the sun, being a little tiny servant in the great astronomic household, it swings on usefully, and yields us enough for the body. Said Christ, "I am the vine, ye are the branches." "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." "Abide in me, and I in you." "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."

Judges vi.-viii.

GIDEON.

(A Varied Treatment.)

"And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord : and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years" (vi. 1).

GOD punishes indirectly as well as directly. He has agents —strange, rude servants of his, who unconsciously do his will. He can turn the wrath of man as it doth please him. According to the text it hath pleased God sometimes to punish man by man. Instead of calling Israel up into a mountain apart, and there with some great scourge chastising Israel for iniquity, he chooses to hand over his people to the rod of the tyrant ; he allows Midian for seven years to torment Israel. We can punish one another. We do not know always what we are doing ; sometimes in our apparent lawlessness and riotousness we are actually carrying out some divine decree, and God has chosen us, in the very intensity of our madness, to do some terrible thing for him, that some side or other of his holy government may be fully vindicated.

"And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel : and because of the Midianites the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains, and caves, and strong holds" (vi. 2).

If we had looked at the dens, and caves, and strongholds, we should have said : "Some wild beasts have made these ; we see the marks of their great paws ; see how they have torn the mountains and made themselves beds and chambers in the strongholds." So rudely and mistakenly do we interpret some things. The rough homes, these poor hiding places, that the wind could get at so fiercely, and the storm could rage in, were made by men. They who ought to have made the Most High their refuge, who ought to have made God himself their sanctuary, dug in the earth for a home and sought shelter among the rocks, when they might have rested in the secret places of heaven. We are

doing every day—in so far as we are doing wrong—very much of the same thing. We are seeking to ourselves hiding places, we are planning for our own security, we have taken the defence of our life into our own hands, and we have said to money, “Thou shalt be my sanctuary;” to the poor power of our own arm, “Thou shalt be my defence,” and we have said with pagan Ajax to his sword, “Thou art my God.” Alas! poor man, thou hast been burrowing in the dust, scratching in the mud, hollowing out the rocks for a resting place, when God has asked thee to find security in his own power, quietude in his own peace, amplitude and beautifulness of home in his own infinite love. Think of a man tearing the mountains to pieces that he might get security from an enemy; think of a man tearing the rocks out of their places that he might hide himself from some storm of human fury! To such straits men are driven. Oh, that in being so driven they might catch some notion of the great moral purpose which is being worked out even by their torment and homelessness!

“And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites” (vi. 6).

Thus God gets at men through various means. The Midianites came out and spoiled the fields of the Israelites. The camels of the Midianites were without number; they entered the land to destroy it. Wheresoever they laid their hand they crushed the hope of Israel. Has God a way into our life, then, through corn and grass? Has he a way to chastise us through the medium of our business? Can he turn a client away and send a customer in another direction, and blind a man whilst he is counting his money? And can he so arrange things that prosperity shall crumble into adversity, and a dense darkness shall settle upon the brightness of prosperity? This is God's way of working. He gets at men through their skin; he smites them with leprosy that they may learn to pray; he curses their bread that they may cry out for the better life; he drops poison into their water that they may learn that they have committed two evils—they have forsaken him, the fountain of living water, and have hewn out unto themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water. These things should bring us to study, to reflection, to inquiry. Why has this adversity come upon me? Why do men actually pine and die? Is there not a cause? Israel cried unto the Lord, and the

Lord sent a man amongst them, to tell them exactly how the whole thing had happened. How did the man proceed? He proceeded to recall history. God always challenges his doings to mankind in the past. God reads the book of history, and says, "See what I did for you, where I found you, how I delivered you, how I interposed for you in the hour of extremity; see how, by a mighty hand and outstretched arm, I wrought out this whole salvation for you, and no sooner did I recover you to life and to hope, than you turned your backs upon me, and stopped your ears with your fingers, and your hearts went astray from my throne." There is, then, a moral explanation of this whole thing that we call difficulty, or pain, or discipline, disappointment, sorrow, and death. "Ye obeyed not my voice." That is the explanation of it all. The explanation of death, pain, poverty, homelessness, friendlessness, sorrow of every degree, is to be found in the fact, that we have disobeyed the voice of God. There has been the moral lapse, the great spiritual slip, the heart has not retained its integrity, and we have got wrong at the centre, and having become disorganised there, all the outwardness of life has gone off into confusion and riot and darkness, and God has justly vindicated himself by a multitude of pains and penalties, keen distresses and intolerable agonies, all of which are the servants of his righteous and gracious will. How long can God set himself against the cries of the heart of his people? Not long. Israel cried unto the Lord! Did the Lord remove himself ten thousand miles further into the depth of the great solitude that is above? No. He is full of compassion, he is tender in mercy, he is gentle in spirit. When Israel cried God came. Though he might have said, "No," yet he came—for God is love. He knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust. "As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked." "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die?" is the utterance of his expostulating hope and love. So when Israel cried unto the Lord, the Lord inclined his ear, and heard the cry of pain and the prayer of want.

Then comes a most beautiful arrangement: Gideon was threshing wheat, and as he was pursuing his business the angel of the Lord appeared unto him and said, "The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour." God answers the prayers of the

many by touching the life of one. As God had tormented man by man, so God will redeem man by man. This is a great mystery; but it is a mystery of love, it is a secret of the divine education of the world. As God did not take Israel apart into the wilderness, or to the top of a mountain and there scourge him with his own hand, so when he comes to deliver, he will make arrangements which show that in all his government of mankind he proceeds upon the principle of mediation; he saves us by making us to one another instruments of salvation. He blesses man by man, he redeems man by man,—the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost. What was Gideon doing? Threshing wheat. It seems a long way to us—because we will look at things only in their outward relationship—from threshing wheat to the command of a delivering army. It is a long way, if we measure the thing superficially and externally. But to God it is all one, whether you are blacking a shoe or studying a star; whether you are threshing your father's wheat when he had many servants and might have sent one of them to thresh it, or whether you are wearing the crown of God's empire. He says to a man, "A thousand men can plough that furrow, but one only here and there can do the work which I have for thee to do. Come away from the sycamore tree; come away from the receipt of custom." God calls men by his great and wondrous word from one duty to another. All duties, humble and lofty, obscure and imposing, stand equal before God, if so be we have a servant's spirit and a son's love. My friend, there is a call comes to you through your business every day. When you are threshing your wheat, God speaks to you; when you are counting your money, an angel finds you. When God wants a man he knows exactly where to find him. So let me rest content in my sphere. Why should I be chafing myself? Why should I be complaining of the iron bars that cage me in? If God wants me to do some greater work, he knows where I am, and what I can do, and what I am capable of attempting, and at his own time and in his own way he will come for me and promote me to rulership and empire. If I seize that principle, I am strong; I have repose, I have quietude; but if I let go that, I find I am the victim of everything that may happen; the Bible is a chapter of accidents, and verily it is the Bible of a fool!

So Gideon, startled at his work by the presence of an angel, said he did not see how God could be with Israel.

"If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? but now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites" (vi. 13).

Gideon approached the proposition of the angel very cautiously. He said, "If thou art an angel of the Lord, give me some proof of thine identity as such." He put God to the test. He was so startled by the revelation of God, that he was to be the deliverer of Israel, that he proposed test after test. He was a cautious man. Let us beware lest our caution be mere pedantry, and lest it degenerate into sophism. It is right to be cautious. Make sure, in the first instance, and then, having made your ground secure, proceed, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against you. But Gideon, having put the angel to the test, was in his turn put to the test. The angel told Gideon that he was to do a work at home. The idol had been worshipped by Israel, and now the idol was to be torn down. The angel said unto him, "Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock, of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it: and build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place, and take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove that is by it" (vi. 25, 26). What was the meaning of all this? "Gideon, you must be tested." He who would make great revolutions must begin at home; he who would go out and strike a foreign enemy must begin reformation within his own circle. If you are going to fight the Midianites successfully you must reform at home. Take down the idol that thy father hath set up; tear down the idol from the elevated place; begin at home. He who begins there will fight well abroad. But if a man shall leave the idolatry in his own house, and go to fight some enemy that is on the outside, behold his victory shall perish, his renown shall be but the flash of a moment, and he shall have no real and abiding success. So must it be with us; we must go into our own hearts and do the great work of demolition there, so far as the empire of the devil is concerned, before we go out to revolutionise, to correct and to

educate the public. How is it with our home life? How is it with the condition of our hearts? Are we preaching against idolatry in others and yet falling down before Baal ourselves? Are we filled with righteous indignation because of the evil doing of persons who are far away, whilst we ourselves have temples in our hearts set up to the idol gods? These inquiries search the very secrets of our lives; these questions are like the candle of the Lord held over the depths of our own being. Gideon will have a powerless arm when he challenges the Midianites if he go not forth and begin this moral revolution at home.

How did Gideon proceed? He was cautious here again. We shall find that caution was a characteristic trait in Gideon. He did not like to do this in the daytime because he feared his father's household and the men of the city. So what was he to do? The angel had appeared unto him, and a new light had shed itself over his life; a great destiny was proposed to him; he himself had suggested a test of the credentials of the angel, and had been satisfied with that test; in his own turn he himself was to be tested. Now what did he do? He said, "If I go out in the daytime the men of the city will seize me. What am I in their hands? Yea, my own father's household will fall upon me, and I shall be crushed by their cruel power. What shall I do?" And because he could not do it by day he did it by night. Earnest men can find opportunities if they want to do so. He is making a frivolous and impious excuse who says, "I do not like to do it; I am afraid to attempt it; I shrink from going forward; I prefer a modest retirement;" and so lets the work and the call of God slip out of his fingers. If you cannot do it in the morning brightness, you may do it in the evening twilight; if you cannot do it in the noontide glory, you may do it in the midnight darkness. Earnestness always finds opportunities; earnestness always finds the sycamore tree up which it can climb and see Christ. There is always a course open to tact, to reality, to sincerity, to determination. If any man is saying that he cannot make his way through all the difficulties that beset his life so as to get near to God, in the name of all history that is true, in the name of all history that is holy, in the name of all history that is worth preserving, I charge him with a mistake or a lie.

There was sad excitement on the morning of the next day. People finding that Baal had been overthrown were all astonished, and inquiry proceeded. How had this thing been done so suddenly? Done in the night-time? When it was discovered who had done it, they went to the father of Gideon and said, "Now shall thy son be slain for this. Bring out thy son that he may die, because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it." And Joash was changed in a moment: you can touch a man through his child. You can touch his keenest sympathies. When they proceeded to lay a bloody hand upon the head of Gideon, he said, "If Baal be a god let him plead for himself." A grand tone, a right tone! If Baal be a god let him plead his own cause. What is a god worth if he cannot gather himself up again when somebody has thrown him down? The grandest things have been said by men when they have been cut to the quick, when their child's life has trembled in the balance. Joash was a new man from that moment. He made the grandest proposition that ever was made in the whole kingdom of idolatry. He saw Baal on his face. He said, "If Baal be a god let him get up again!" This is exactly what we say to all the gods of England. Have you been trusting to money, to power, to health, to friends, to luck, to chance? Let them help you in the hour of extremity, but, beware, there was once a scornful laugh among the nations, a scornful laugh ringing along the courses of the whirlwind: It was this, "Thy calf, O Samaria, hath cast thee off!" Samaria had worshipped the calf; God had risen in judgment to vindicate his government, to vindicate his claim to human attention, and when Samaria went to the calf it turned Samaria off. He is but a poor god who cannot save us in extremity—who cannot speak for himself—in whose arm there is no power of self-defence.

Gideon, having been satisfied that he was called of God to do this great work, betook himself to it. But there was one difficulty in the way,—a strange difficulty, too, and peculiarly worthy of note. The Lord said, "Gideon, the people that are with thee are too many." When did God ever complain of having too few people to work with? Tell me. I have heard him say, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I." I

have heard him say, "One shall chase a thousand, and two shall put ten thousand to flight." But I never heard him say, "You must get more men, or I cannot do this work; you must increase the human forces, or the divine energy will not be equal to the occasion." I hear him say, in the case before us, "Gideon, the people are too many by some thousands. If I were to fight the Midianites with so great a host, the people would say, after the victory had been won, 'Mine own hand hath saved me.'" Now the Lord proposed that a proclamation should be made unto the people, saying, "Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from Mount Gilead." How many of the people think you returned? Twenty-two thousand went off at once. You cannot do much with a crowd. The crowd never did anything for the world or for itself. Twenty-two thousand went away, ten thousand remained. Now the Lord will say ten thousand is just enough. No. He said, "Gideon, the people are yet too many; they will still boast of their numbers, and they will take all the credit to themselves, if I delivered Israel from the Midianites by their instrumentality; we must have fewer still." So they were taken down to the water, and every one that lapped of the water with his tongue as a dog lappeth he was set by himself, and he alone was taken; and out of the thirty-two thousand Israelites, but three hundred men were called upon to do the great work. Most people are afraid. It is only a man here and there can set himself up with true courage; there are only about three hundred out of every thirty-two thousand that are worth anything for real fighting, for real endurance, for real enterprise. The work of the world has always been done by the few; inspiration was held by a few; wealth is held by a few; poetry is put into the custody of but a few; wisdom is guarded in her great temple but by a few; the few saved the world; ten men would have saved the cities of the plain; Potiphar's house is blessed because of Joseph; and that ship tossed and torn upon the billows of the Adriatic shall be saved because there is an apostle of God on board. Little child, you may be saving all your house—your father, your mother, your brothers, and your sisters. Young man in the city warehouse, a blessing may be coming upon the whole establishment because of your prayer and sobriety, truthfulness, honour, and religious faith. We cannot tell how

these things work. There is a secret behind all appearances, and we know not the meaning that underlies all the unrest, and storm, and confusion of life. Still, we may be of some use in other ways. If we cannot go forward to the fight, we can go back to the fields and plough. If I am not one of the three hundred men that can go and take Midian captive, I may be a quiet, homely man, who can repair a fence, or set a gate in order, or plough a furrow, or continue and complete the work which was interrupted by the calling away of the three hundred men. We can all do something. Cyphers are inexpressive and worthless by themselves, but when a unit is put at their head, they are gifted with articulation and value. So let the three hundred mighty ones lead the world; and those who can fight, and think, and scheme, and govern a state, and make law, and write books, go on, and God bless them! But let us who are of a humbler mould and poorer nature know that still there remains some kind of really useful good work for us to do. "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing!"

What does this teach us? What is the application of this to the men of to-day? It is this: that human history is under divine control. God's eye, though in heaven, is looking upon the children of men. Afflictions do not spring out of the dust. If the rod be laid heavily upon our backs, it is because God would take out of us some desire that is evil, punish us for some way that is corrupt, seeking thus to recover us from the error we have committed. This history further teaches that the Lord himself finds a deliverer. Israel did not call upon Gideon, Israel did not call a council of war, and by some lucky stroke of genius deliver themselves. The Midianites were to be overthrown. This was a divine proposition, this was the arrangement of God. Salvation is from on high; deliverance is from the Lord of hosts. When there was no eye to pity, when there was no arm to save, his own eye pitied, and his own arm brought salvation. What is true in this little local case is true in the great and universal condition of humanity. The Redeemer is from heaven; the Deliverer is not a creation of earth. He who delivers mankind comes from the depths of eternity, having the ancientness of unbeginning time upon him, and the power of omnipotence in

his arm. We cannot be delivered by ourselves. "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." God hath laid help upon one that is mighty, and the name of that one is Jesus Christ, God the Son, who came into the world to save sinners, and redeem from a worse than Midianitish bondage.

Then God by all this teaches us that no flesh shall glory in his presence. Man shall not arise, and say, "We have devised a scheme of salvation; we have bought ourselves with gold of our own coining; we have found a file, by the use of which we can cut in twain the iron chains that bound us." God does the work. Our salvation is of his own mercy, of his own grace and power. It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* He hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are. It hath pleased God to withhold the battle from the strong and the race from the swift, and give honour to whom he will, that no flesh shall glory in his presence!

See, yonder a man glorying in God's presence. He lifts up his hands, he lifts up his eyes, he lifts up his voice and says, he is "not as other men." He tells God how clean his hands are, how often he washes them, and to what perfection he has brought his character. There is also another man with downcast eyes, who has smitten his bosom, and who can only say with a sob, "God, be merciful to me a sinner." He is the man who takes heaven back with him to his home. But where there is a spirit of self-trust and self-glorying, there can be no true honour, there can be no true salvation. It is when I am nothing, when I renounce myself, when I cast my whole life upon the Son of God, that I know what it is to be gathered into the love of God, and to be hidden in the sanctuary of his power. The day of salvation is come, the Deliverer is amongst us. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus is come into the world to save sinners. There was a man in the ancient time, who, having been called to a charge, allowed his charge to slip from him, and when he was asked the reason, he said, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone!" Let us be busy here and there, and yet mind the great

business. Let us be threshing our wheat, and still be willing to show hospitality to the angels of God. Let us be doing the duty of the passing day, and yet let our doors be ajar that God may come in whenever it doth please him to visit us in our low estate!

SELECTED NOTES.

Though he resisted the offer of a throne, Gideon fell into the error of meddling with the priestly office; a snare into which he may have been betrayed by the command, which he received and obeyed, to build an altar in his city of Ophrah, and offer on it a sacrifice to Jehovah. This isolated act, connected with his rescuing the people from the worship of Baal, and, with the manifestation of the Angel of Jehovah to him (compare and contrast 1 Chron. xxi. 28, xxii. 1), was perhaps made the beginning of a system of sacrifices there; at all events, he prepared an ephod, the well-known high-priestly garment used in consulting God (Exod. xxviii. 6-30; 1 Sam. xxiii. 6, 9). Whether he meant no more than to have a memorial of the divinely-appointed ephod, and the way of approaching God by it, as the eastern tribes had built an altar merely for a memorial (Josh. xxii. 26-29), it is impossible to tell; even so, there was a serious risk that he might go farther than he intended. But it is an old opinion that the high priests at Shiloh had early lost the confidence of the people, and had sunk into insignificance; certainly they are never mentioned or referred to in the Book of Judges, after Aaron's grandson the illustrious Phinehas (xx. 28); and long before Gideon's time there had been a schismatical and even idolatrous priestly system set up by the tribe of Dan in the town to which they gave their patriarch's name, and this, too, arose out of an unlawful family sanctuary and its ephod (xvii. 5, xviii. 30, 31). There is no warrant whatever for imputing the same sin to Gideon; yet he did something which looked in that direction, possibly bringing the high priest from Shiloh to use his ephod at Ophrah, possibly using it himself. Even if he himself escaped the more serious consequences, yet (ver. 27), all Israel went a-whoring after it there, and it became a snare to himself and his house, with evil lurking in it, and ere long bursting forth with lamentable results. The high priest's ephod, with all its attendant ornaments in the breastplate, and with its precious stones, must have been very costly; we need feel no surprise that Gideon laid out upon his ephod 1,700 shekels of gold, or about 53 lb. avoirdupois; nor that so much gold was obtained from this vast multitude of the enemy, since the Arabs to this day manifest an extraordinary love for golden ornaments. Perhaps Gideon thought himself like Moses, when he received the contributions for the tabernacle (Exod. xxxv. 20-23), many of those also being the spoils taken from their oppressors; while the men of war who willingly responded to his request may have felt like their ancestors, when they made a similar free-will offering after an earlier Midianite war (Num. xxxi. 48-50). *There were other dangers in Gideon's*

position, of which his polygamy is an evidence. Even had he been king, the law of God against multiplying wives was explicit (Deut. xvii. 17): yet though he refused to be ruler, in those forty years of rest and prosperity, he must have assumed something of royal state in its worst oriental form, with a harem. And there is enough in the language of the original (comp. Neh. ix. 7; Dan. v. 12) to lead to the conjecture that the name Abimelech, "A king's father," was one which he gave to his concubine's son in addition to the name given to him originally, one of those epithets or descriptive names which were common among the Jews: if so, the lad was one of those spoilt children like Adonijah (1 Kings i. 6), who brought misery and shame upon their families. Gideon himself died "in a good old age," an expression used elsewhere only of his father Abraham (Gen. xv. 15, xxv. 8), and of David (1 Chron. xxix. 28); but his death was the signal for the renewed outbreak of all evil. It seems to have taken the form of open apostasy, substituting "Baal of the Covenant" as their covenant God instead of Jehovah; though possibly there was an attempt to combine the worship of the two. And when the people did not remember Jehovah their deliverer, no surprise need be felt at their thankless forgetfulness of his earthly instrument and representative, whose two names seem united into one at ver. 35, as if to recall and combine all that he had procured for Israel both of temporal and of spiritual blessings.—*Rev. Principal Douglas, D.D.*

"*And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites*" (vi. 6).—The Midianites had oppressed Israel so grievously that the people were forced to flee from the open country, and to seek an asylum in mountain fastnesses, in caves, and in fortified cities (vi. 1, 2). Midian was now at the head of a great confederacy, comprising the Amalekites and the leading tribes of Arabia, called by the sacred historian *Beni Kedem* ("children of the East," [v. 3]). In early spring the confederates assembled their vast flocks and herds, descended through the defiles of Gilead, crossed the Jordan, and overran the rich plains of central Palestine, plundering and destroying all before them (vi. 5). In their distress the Israelites cried unto the Lord, and he sent a deliverer in the person of Gideon (8-13). The invaders were concentrated on Esdraelon—their flocks covering the whole of that splendid plain, and their encampment lying along the base of "the hill of Moreh," now called little Hermon (vi. 33; vii. 1, 12). Gideon assembled his band of warriors at the well of Harod, or fountain of Jezreel, situated at the foot of Gilboa, and famed in after days as the scene of Saul's defeat and death (vii. 1). Gideon having collected the forces of Israel, followed the fugitives across the Jordan, up the hills of Gilead, and away over the plain into the heart of their own country. There he completely overthrew the whole host (viii. 12). The power of Midian was completely broken. In a single campaign they lost their princes, the flower of their warriors, and their vast wealth. "Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so they lifted up their heads no more" (viii. 28). Their name as a nation appears no more in history.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, is not all our life a parable, full of instruction, full of rebuke, yet full of comfort? Thou art always coming to us in figures and incidents, and in things we cannot explain, mysteries that darken upon us, and lights above the brightness of the sun. Thou dost whisper to us in the night-season, when the darkness is round about us like prison walls; then thou dost call us out into the warm morning, into the liberty which is beyond, large and glorious liberty. Thou dost teach us by our disappointments and sorrows: our losses thou dost make eloquent with instruction; and, behold, night and day thy purpose is to make us wise unto salvation. O that we had the hearing ear, the understanding mind, the attentive heart; then thy gospels would not be lost upon us, but would be to us as light from heaven. Make thy word live as we read it. May we know it to be true because of the answering voice within. May our judgment witness, and our conscience testify, that this is none other than the voice of the living God. So shall our life be strengthened, beautified, and introduced into great freedom. We come before thee evermore to seek thy pardon, for our sins are as numerous as our days: we spoil every hour by some touch of rudeness, some act of violence, some aversion of soul from light and truth. But that we know this sinfulness is itself a blessing: if we confess our sin, we know that whilst we are confessing it at the cross of Jesus Christ thy Son, our Saviour, thou dost look upon him rather than upon us, and for the sake of his work thou dost pardon the iniquity which we repent. This is our joy, this is the good news from heaven: we accept it, and answer it, and are glad because of thy forgiveness. Direct us all our days. Their number dwindles; their light is uncertain; their messages are more urgent. Help us to seize the passing time, and inscribe it with love and service and sacrifice. Dry the tears of our sorrow. Lift the burden from us when it is more than we can carry. Attemper the wind to the shorn lamb. Undertake for us in all perplexities and embarrassments and difficulties, and give us the joy of those whose perfect trust is in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Judges ix.

ABIMELECH—THE BRAMBLE KING.

IS Abimelech dead? Has he reappeared in our own days? Or after the devil made Abimelech did he throw the mould away? These questions are not difficult. We can easily

determine them, either in the positive or in the negative. It would be something worth doing to be able to establish as a fact the absolute certainty of the death of Abimelech and all his progeny. But we must take the evidence as we find it, and abide by the issue to which it points, whatever that issue may be. This is the only just way of reading human history, and we must not suspend it, or pervert it, simply to confirm our own prejudices or inclinations. The broad lines of the career of Abimelech are written in this chapter, and are easy of comprehension. Abimelech was the son of Gideon. So far that may be put down to his credit. But his mother was only a concubine, or a wife of the second rank. So Abimelech stands somewhat on one side in history. It is often awkward to have incidental relations in life: they surprise the parties interested at unexpected times; they flash out light in the darkness; they make noise when deep sleep falleth upon man. Still, Abimelech had advantages arising from the concubinage of Gideon. He was related to the Ephraimites on the one hand and to the Canaanites on the other. It has been pointed out in the case of our own Henry II. that he boasted that he was the first Norman son of a Saxon mother. Abimelech may make use of this peculiarity in his history, and may work along that line of policy and adventure. Still, we must not blame Abimelech where no blame is due. We are not asked how we will be born into the world, or where; otherwise some of us would never have been born at all. Do not throw a man's disadvantages in his face. There are misfortunes as well as crimes, and a just criticism of character and of history will ever distinguish between the one and the other. Abimelech must speak for himself. When he begins to talk we shall understand somewhat of the quality of his mind, but even there we must make critical and perhaps generous allowance. We do not now begin the human race. Even now we are tainted or blessed by our past. Only God, therefore, can judge the world. We see but the individual man, the narrow and open circumstances of life; and the basis of inference is too narrow to justify us in supposing that it is in our power to form a comprehensive and final judgment. "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you

again." Abimelech himself may illustrate these fundamental principles.

Abimelech was ambitious. By so much he lives to-day. He would be king; who would not? There is a taking of the lowest seat at the feast which is the veriest pride. When Diogenes trampled upon the robe of Plato he said, "Thus I tread on Plato's pride;" Plato answered, "With greater pride of your own." So if we find Abimelech wanting to be king, the air is full of Abimelechs. There are various kingdoms and thrones and primacies for which men are striving night and day. Who has not his own little ambition? It looks innocent enough in some cases: it is but to add a letter or two to the name; or to live in a larger house; or to be able to give hospitality that will create a reputation for itself; or to be named by some distinguished writer; it does not lie at all along the high line which is supposed to be terminated by a throne: but, as a mere matter of analysis the action or purpose underlying it is as full of ambition as if the man, actuated by that motive, had fixed his eyes upon the supreme throne of the world. Abimelech was adroit. He put a question. Are interrogators dead? He put a question that was noble and unselfish in its letters, namely, "Whether is better for you?" as if to say, It is no matter of mine; your interests are supreme: I open my business on the public highway for the good of the public; it is of no consequence to me whether you buy my goods or not; I lay them before you and give you the golden opportunity, and you must say what you will do in the matter. Is that man dead? Why, he is a thousand strong in nearly every great thoroughfare! Time cannot kill him; he can be found at a moment's notice. But Abimelech was unjust in his benevolence. The question he put had no right to be put, because it involved others, namely, "Whether is better for you, either that all the sons of Jerubbaal, which are threescore and ten persons, reign over you, or that one reign over you?" (v. 2). Would you like to have seventy kings, or one king? Now the spirit of Abimelech was false, because the seventy men had never said anything about wishing to be kings. Why do we first credit men with bad motives, and then charge those bad motives upon them as accusations, as if

they had originated in the spirit of the men themselves? We must not put one another into false positions. If the seventy sons of Jerubbaal had said, "We would all like to be kings," the case would have been put precisely in the terms which Abimelech used. But Gideon had refused the kingship. Long ago, when the Israelites said, Rule thou over us, and thy house, he said, No, I will not rule over you, nor my house: the Lord is your king. How subtle is the temptation to misconstrue a man's purposes, and then to treat him as if he had actually originated those purposes! We transfer ourselves to the man, and having invested him with an enforced personality we judge him by that investiture. The spirit of injustice is a cruel spirit.

The action which Abimelech took was to kill the sons of Gideon. That was the rude method of the times. Seventy men were in the way, and the answer to the embarrassment was—Murder! So the sons of Gideon, seventy in number, were murdered "upon one stone"—probably flung from one rock and dashed to pieces. How will Abimelech die? We must wait to see. But one son escaped, namely, the youngest, Jotham by name. How is it that one always does escape? Account for the one little Fleance always getting out of the way and coming back at unexpected times, and facing society like a living judgment. It is in so-called little things that the providence of God is vividly shown. Not the oldest, strongest son, but little Jotham, we may call him, for he certainly was the youngest. He came upon a given day, and spake a parable upon the top of Mount Gerizim. He "lifted up his voice, and cried, and said"—and then comes the parable, or fable, of the trees. It is rather a fable than what we now understand by a parable. It is more after, as we should say, the lines of Æsop than the lines of Christ. But a fable may be the larger truth. How is it that the men living at the time cannot write the history of what they see? We say, This statesman, or that reformer, must be left for critical judgment to the historian. Or we say, The event is too near us to be correctly judged. That is to say, a man who is not yet born will arise and tell the world the exact meaning of what we are now doing! Why, then, this wonderful objection to Biblical prophets and Biblical judgments? It is the very

principle upon which we ourselves operate day by day. There can be nothing much more startling to what we call common-sense than that a man who is not yet born shall arise and give a true version of the men's motives, purposes, and histories who lived a thousand years before he himself was born. So fable takes up the real meaning of things,—that marvellous composition we call fiction, dramatic interpretation, the lifting of things up from low levels, into right line and colour,—that most wondrous of all God's gifts to man, the gift of Imagination. Jotham displayed amazing intellectual sagacity, and expressed himself with exquisite verbal beauty. It required an attentive mind to follow him. The man speaks about trees; the trees going forth to anoint a king over them; the trees asking the olive, and the olive declining; then asking the fig-tree, and the fig-tree saying No; then asking the vine, and the vine refusing the throne; last of all, the bramble—lean, prickly, sharp—asking in a taunting tone if they were willing to put their trust in his shadow; if so, he, the bramble, would reign over the cedars of Lebanon. Pride at first says, Who shall we have to reign over us? At last Pride says, Who can we *get* to be our king? God humbles pride. The first inquiry made by a Church may be, Who shall we have for our minister? and the last may be, Who can we get? who will come? It is right: all really good people are pre-engaged. The olive-tree says, "Should I leave my fatness, wherewith by me they honour God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" The fig-tree says, "Should I forsake my sweetness, and my good fruit, and go to be promoted over the trees?" The vine says, "Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man, and go to be promoted over the trees?" All the good trees are pre-occupied. All the men worth having to reign over us are already enthroned. Kings are not falling about the streets to be picked up by any passer-by. Last of all, the trees becoming a little disappointed, actually renounced their courtesy, and said to the bramble, somewhat brusquely, "Come thou, and reign over us." No question was asked; no opportunity of declining was given; but, with a kind of satiric brutality, the trees said, We must have a king—here, come, and take the throne. The parable is spoken. It is sprinkled, so to say, on the air, and is apparently lost. No;

the air is full of sermons yet to be applied. They will take fire some day, and come back upon us with startling, if not destructive, energy. No wise word is lost; no fable charged with sacred meaning has vanished with the smoke of the day in which it was spoken. Cheer thy heart, godly teacher; the sermons appear to be all lost. They are listened to, but not answered. The appeal, warm with thy very blood, accentuated by the fire of life, may apparently be lost. But there is a time of resurrection in these things, and swift application, a day of judgment before the judgment day, and then it will be known what every man has done in endeavouring to serve his age. Again and again in the life of Christ we read such words as these, "Then remembered they,"—that is to say, circumstances had gathered themselves into such proportions, and had addressed themselves with such vigour to the mind and the memory, that something within was awakened, the old word was sounded in the ear, and it came with its full and noble meaning. The man who can make a beautiful parable can make a beautiful sermon also. Jotham made a magnificent appeal:—

"Now therefore, if ye have done truly and sincerely [a bitterly ironical supposition], in that ye have made Abimelech king, and if ye have dealt well with Jerubbaal and his house, and have done unto him according to the deserving of his hands; (for my father fought for you, and adventured [*cast*,—"he hath poured out his soul unto death,"] his life far, and delivered you out of the hand of Midian: and ye are risen up against my father's house this day, and have slain his sons, threescore and ten persons [Jotham himself is counted in this number], upon one stone, and have made Abimelech, the son of his maidservant [intentionally contemptuous], king over the men of Shechem, because he is your brother;) if ye then have dealt truly and sincerely with Jerubbaal and with his house this day, then rejoice ye in Abimelech, and let him also rejoice in you: but if not, let fire come out from Abimelech, and devour the men of Shechem, and the house of Millo; and let fire come out [exactly fulfils vv. 45-49] from the men of Shechem, and from the house of Millo, and devour Abimelech" (vv. 16-20).

The *epimuthion*, or application of the fable, was magnificent in moral tone. Jotham comprehended the great philosophy that water cannot rise above its level: men cannot rise above the honour that is in them. Little men cannot be great; ungrateful men cannot be just; mean souls can never be majestic. Jotham said in effect: If this is your idea of honour, so be it, take the consequences; if this is your reading of history, and this

your tribute to the illustrious dead, let it be so. Men must act according to their own quality. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles. The criticism with which your life is followed will be according to the quality of the critics: tainted men will see putridity in you; men of ungenerous mind will never write or speak one glowing word about your action. They are hardly to be blamed; they cannot help it: every tree grows after its own kind, so does every man. The appeal of Jotham is the appeal which men may address to the ages, though they run away as Jotham did, and flee into darkness; but the appeal will abide when the speaker has gone. Children, if this is your idea of what is due to your father and your mother who lived for you, suffered for you, had but one thought, and that a thought for your comfort and progress, if this is your idea of gratitude and justice to their memory, carry out your programme, and let the times that are coming judge you. Nations, if this is the way in which you treat your statesmen, your patriots, your reformers, so be it: nations cannot rise above their level: by your treatment of your leaders and patriots we shall know your own quality. Nations write themselves in the deeds which they do to those who have led and instructed them. Congregations, if this be your idea of what is due to your ministers and teachers, so be it; if after the men have prayed themselves into agony for you, studied your distresses that they might heal your wounds, lived for you, thought for you, sacrificed themselves on the altar of your welfare, if you care to forget the past, to throw out the old men and let them die where they may, so be it: congregations cannot rise above their level. Congregations must carry out their own idea of honour. They find it convenient to forget, to obliterate, the noblest service which man can render to man. Be it so. Do not reason with them. It is an inevitable meanness. Then the other side is true: there are grateful children; there are nations loyal to their chiefs; there are congregations greater than the ministers. So be it. On both sides we can but say with Jotham, So be it; rejoice, and rejoice in one another.

After three years peace was broken. Abimelech conquered until he came to Thebez, where there was a strong tower; and full of his father's intrepidity and daring courage, he went

straight up to the tower and said he would destroy it, or overthrow it, or burn it. The people went to the top of the tower, and a woman among them looked out, and saw this man fighting against its very walls, and she dropped a stone, and it crushed the head of Abimelech. He killed the sons of Gideon with a stone: God also can throw stones. Let us take care: "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." When Adoni-bezek had his thumbs and great toes cut off he said, "As I have done, so God hath requited me." The treacherous idolaters had their temple burned by the treachery of their enemies. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

"Thus,"—we read:

"God rendered the wickedness of Abimelech, which he did unto his father, in slaying his seventy brethren: and all the evil of the men of Shechem did God render upon their heads: and upon them came the curse of Jotham the son of Jerubbaal" (vv. 56, 57).

To some curses we must say Amen. They vindicate themselves. We cannot do other than concur in some judgments. We may revolt from them, turn aside with great feeling of sorrow: yet there have been cases in which parents have been obliged to concur in the sentence which doomed their son to death. This is the view we shall be made to take in the great summing-up of things. None shall be "lost, but the son of perdition." Christ is mighty to save, and none shall be taken out of his hand but the son of waste—the man of whom nothing can be made, the man who is in very deed a suicide, not killing the body, but slaying the self, the soul, the thing that made him a man. Let us so read history as to take warning from its bad men, and encouragement from its good men; and let us learn that there is but one place of safety, Jesus—the Rock eternal!

SELECTED NOTES.

Cast a piece of millstone.—So that ambitious King Pyrrhus was at last slain with a tile-stone thrown upon his head by a woman. And the like deadly blow by a like hand, upon the head of Hermanius, Earl of Lucelberg, whom Pope Hildebrand had set up in opposition to Henry the Emperor, whom

he had excommunicated. Simeon De' Monteforti also, another of the Pope's champions, fighting against those ancient Protestants, the Waldenses, was brained with a stone at the siege of Toulouse. That scholar that took his death by the falling of a letter of stone from the Earl of Northampton's house at the funeral of Queen Anne, was to be pitied. But commentators observe it for a just hand of God upon Abimelech, that upon one stone he had slain his seventy brethren, and now a stone slayeth him: his head had stolen the crown of Israel, and now his head is smitten.

The vengeance which he had wreaked upon Shechem, he intended also for Thebez, a town placed by the Onomasticon thirteen Roman miles from Neapolis (Shechem) on the road to Beth-Shean, or Beisân; which is therefore the modern Tûbâs, twelve miles E.N.E. of Shechem. One might infer from this that the son considered himself the lawful successor of his father in the government of Israel, and meant to punish these two cities as Succoth and Penuel had been punished for their rebellion. But his utter failure, his death by the hand of a woman (like Sisera, iv. 9), and his miserable effort to escape by suicide from this disgrace, to a bold warrior, were the tokens in providence that he wanted the moral and spiritual qualities of Gideon. And his personal ruin, together with the immediately resulting collapse of the government which he had established over Israel, marked the fulfilment of Jotham's curse. It is mere ignorance of old English which in many copies of the Bible changed "alto brake," that is, "altogether brake," into "all to break" in ver. 53.

In the providence of God a spirit of rebellion and hatred was allowed to work its influence upon the Shechemites. Gaal, probably a Canaanite, came to the city, and excited the inhabitants at the time of the vintage festival, urging that Abimelech was half an Israelite, and that it behoved them to establish a pure native rule. Abimelech was privately informed of the conspiracy by Zebul, one of his followers, whom he had made ruler of Shechem; and with an energy and promptitude that recall the military abilities of his father, at once proceeded to quell the revolt. He defeated Gaal, who attempted to exclude him from Shechem, and on the following day took the city with much slaughter of his former subjects. The temple-citadel in which the rest took refuge he burned to the ground, and then besieged Thebez, which had borne a part in the insurrection. The people fled to the citadel, and Abimelech proceeded to lay fire at the gate. Here, however, his reign and his life came suddenly to an end. A piece of a mill-stone, flung by a woman from the battlements, fractured his skull, and, at his own request, his armour-bearer thrust him through with a sword. Thus ended the dark, dishonourable career of "the Bramble King," after a tyranny of three years, and thus closed one of the most degrading chapters in the history of Israel.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we are part of thy purpose in the creation of the world. We know not why we are here. We are here by no will of our own : the times are hard, the temptations are a million in number, the chances are that we may be lost. We cannot tell what all this means. Thou didst not ask us to be here. We are often full of pain and sore distress, hardly knowing the right hand from the left ; mocked in our prayers ; disappointed, not only in our ambitions, but in our rational hopes ; borne down by a great weight, threatened by an immeasurable cloud, full of blackness, charged with thunder. What we love we lose : we grow flowers only to see them wither, and rear children that they may break our hearts, and pet the household lamb that it may be stolen. This is a great mystery. We knew not any of its meaning in ourselves. We bless thee for a book which interprets the riddle. We hear in that Gospel-book music from heaven, voices from beyond, assurances that the darkness is but for a moment, and that a great light has already started from the eternal throne and will be here presently. We have read the story of thy Son, and we know it to be true : this Man receiveth sinners ; this Man talks to the broken heart, and holds up pictures of the kingdom long enough for us to see them through our tears. He loved us : he preached in our towns and villages ; he gave us bread when we were hungry ; he cured the sick man whom the physicians had abandoned ; he allowed us to approach him by night when we dared not go by day : he saved others,—himself he did not save ; he forgave his enemies dying, and he sent gospels to them living ; and now he is exalted, a King, a Prince, a Saviour, to give repentance unto Israel and remission of sins ; and he carries the little earth in his heart like a thing loved with all heaven's love. We know Jesus Christ. We love him. His name is wrought into the very texture of our life : to take it away is to take away our breath. He was our visitor when none else would come near the house ; he lighted the lamp when the chamber was all darkness ; he came out into the wilderness to seek and to save that which was lost. We cannot forget his cross : if we forget that cross, may our right hand forget its cunning ; if we cease to remember that death, may our tongue cleave to the roof of our mouth. Lead us to see that all other deliverances point to the one redemption. As we move along the line of Biblical story, may we feel that One greater is yet to come than any deliverer who has appeared. May we find our way through providence to redemption, through history to revelation, and through the altars built by men to the cross set up from before the foundation of the world ; thus will our reading be profitable, full of spiritual nutriment, and our souls shall grow in the school of God, and

around them shall be wrought the mystery of grace, as we spend our nights and days with Jesus. We put our hands into thine. The way is too long for us, and too rough; who made the road we cannot tell, but our feet are weary, and our eyes are distressed by the vast monotony. But in thy society there is no weariness; in thine inspiration, O Holy Spirit of the living God, heaven begins. Feed us; lead us; keep us;—may no wanderer be lost! Amen.

Judges x.

AFTER ABIMELECH.

WE have had much excitement in many of the pages through which we have inquiringly passed. We now come to a period of extreme quietness. For five and forty years nothing occurred in Israel worth naming in detail. Tola and Jair, though judges in Israel, lived and died in the utmost quietness. They occupy about four lines each in the history of their people. Quietness has no history. Events are recorded; stories, anecdotes, incidents,—these claim the attention of the historical pen; but peace, quietness, industry, patience, inoffensiveness, these have no historian: a line or two will do for them,—the war must have chapter after chapter. The popular proverb is, “Blessed are the people who have no annals.” Within a narrow sense that is true; the sense is very narrow.

Read verses 1, 2:—

“And after Abimelech [who is not counted among the judges] there arose to defend [or save, equal to deliver] Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar [probably the only judge furnished by this indolent tribe]; and he dwelt in Shamir in mount Ephraim. And he judged Israel twenty and three years, and died, and was buried in Shamir.”

Is that dull reading? Of what tribe was the man? “Issachar.” Has Issachar any fame? Let us bethink ourselves: who can remember anything said in the Bible about Issachar? The solution of the mystery may be in that direction. The individual man may have no great repute, but he may belong to a tribe quite renowned for some virtue. Mark these words: “The children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” Then Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, belonged to a tribe of statesmen. It was nothing to them to propound great schemes, work out great reforms, propose wholesome ameliorations: great things came

naturally in their way. If a little tribe had attempted any one of the reforms proposed and executed by Issachar he would have become famous. A very short pedestal would make a giant of a dwarf. But the men of Issachar were accustomed to statesmanship; they were famed for their sagacity; they had the piercing eyes that could see through all surfaces, veilings, sophisms,—that could read the necessity of the age, the temper and desire of the heart of Israel. So we must not pass by these negative characters as if they were really nothing. A touch of their hand might be equal to the stroke of a powerful instrument. One word spoken by a man of the tribe of Issachar might have in it a volume of wisdom. We must not measure men by the lines which the historian spends upon them. There is family history, household training, sagacity that makes no noise, farsightedness that disappoints the immediate ambition, but that prepares for the discipline and schooling and perfecting of a lifetime. Let those who spend their lives in the shadow think of these things: they may have a fame distinctively their own, not noisy, tempestuous, tumultuous, but profound, healthful, lasting,—blessed are they who have the renown of wisdom, the fame of understanding: that will endure when many a vaporous reputation has been exhaled, forgotten. The men of Issachar were wise men,—men of solid head, clear brain, comprehensive vision; men who put things together, and deduced from them inferences which amounted to philosophies; they had understanding of the times: they were not fretted and chafed by the incidents of the passing day; they saw the meaning that underlaid the event, and they knew what Israel ought to do. Bless God for good leadership—in the state, in business, in the family, everywhere; the greater it is the more silent it may sometimes be.

“And after him arose Jair, a Gileadite, and judged Israel twenty and two years. And he had thirty sons [representing an ostentatious polygamy] that rode on thirty ass colts [implying the great wealth of the household], and they had thirty cities which are called Havoth-jair [Havoth, meaning villages] unto this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died, and was buried in Camon” (vv. 3-5).

That is the great danger of times of quietness. When there is little to excite attention and develop energy the tendency is that men may notice little things and make much of them. There

was not much to do in Israel when it could be noted how many sons any man had, and whether they rode on ass colts or otherwise. That danger besets all life. In the absence of great questions, thrilling problems of an imperial or social kind, men betake themselves to little pedantries, frivolous amusements, trifling inquiries: the greater nature sleeps, and little, active, nimble fancy presides over the life, and fritters it away. We want every now and then some great heroic occasion that shall swallow up all our little fancies, whims, and oddities, and make men of us. We need visitations of a providential kind to shake us out of our littleness and frivolity, and make us mighty in prayer, almost sublime in thought, certainly heroic in self-control and patience. Thus God has educated the world. Mark how the marvellous history has gone; in what measured undulation: sometimes the mountains have been very high, and have been untouched except by the feet of the eagle, unploughed except by the lightning of God,—far away, lost in the cloud; sometimes the heights have been quite accessible, so green, so velvetlike in their sward, and so rich in new and surprising flora; then we have come further down into great gardens, quiet villages, places sacred to slumber, and whilst we were revelling in the luxury of quietness a great clang tore the air and a trumpet summoned us to sudden war. So the Bible story has proceeded, and as the sun has set upon the day quiet, or the day of strife, we have felt a sense of incompleteness, which has often become quite religious, and has said to itself, This is not all; the punctuation is intermediate, not final; surely all these occurrences mean a greater incarnation than we have ever yet beheld. We need great excitements or solemn occasions in the family, or we should drivel away into the most frivolous existence. Given sound health, abundant prosperity, everything the heart could desire,—what is the issue of it all? Satiety; great difficulty in being pleased; an outworn appetite or desire; taking up with trivial things; a sensitiveness that is easily offended; a pride that would be contemptible if it were not so transparent. How they talk who have much goods laid up for many years! How difficult to please with their books, which they never read, and their pictures which they only buy because others have recommended them! How difficult to please with their friends, their feasts, their entertainments! How

sensitive to cold ! How extremely sensitive to draughts ! How altogether peculiar ! The Lord could not allow this to be going on, or the people would decay, fall away from manhood, and disappoint the very purpose and decree of heaven. So affliction must come, and loss, and the whole house must rock under the wind ; then the people will become themselves again ; they will think, pray, ask serious questions, and look at the reality and gravity of life. So must it be with the Church and with the nation. We must not have too much quietness. Our quiet periods must be alternated by periods of great stress and difficulty. Watch how God has trained the world. We do not see the method in any one verse or incident. Herein is the peculiarity of the Bible, that it must be read consecutively, page after page in sequence, until we begin to feel we are perusing a great architectural design, or a marvellous plan of war, or a sublime philosophy of education. Men may read the Bible in fragments, and know nothing about it. The Bible must be read continuously and cumulatively, until it prove its inspiration by its unity, and arrest human confidence by manifest proofs of divine dictation. Therefore we cannot stop in the historical books. We are thankful for them : so full of life, colour, action ; many chapters have been written with the sword, others with rough pens, and others are but living hints of things that cannot be expressed ; yet on we must go to the end, until the time when the whole book satisfies itself and satisfies its readers by a grand Amen.

“And the children of Israel did evil again [added to do evil] in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria [see Gen. xxxv. 2, 4], and the gods of Zidon [1 Kings xi. 5], and the gods of Moab [1 Kings xi. 7], and the gods of the children of Ammon [Lev. xviii. 21], and the gods of the Philistines [observe how the seven idols correspond with the seven retributive oppressions], and forsook the Lord, and served not him” (v. 6).

We are sometimes afraid of *religious* excitement, but who ever is afraid of *irreligious* enthusiasm ? It is supposed that all the exaggeration and sensationalism must be on one side ; hence Christians are often foolishly and unjustly charged with religious fanaticism. There are revivals of godlessness ; there are revivals of worldliness. What think ye of that ? This sixth verse burns with unholy enthusiasm. Hear the list :—Having taken to

idolatry, Israel took to it earnestly, with both hands—"and served Baalim, and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, and the gods of Zidon, and the gods of Moab, and the gods of the children of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines,"—any number of gods. Yet if Christian people are at all warm in their subject, they become "fanatics," and are blamed for sensationalism, by men who work seven days in the week to increase their balance at the bank! Let us keep the matter steadily in view. Which is better, a great excitement in the Church in the direction of bringing men to Jesus Christ, saving souls from death, converting the world; or a devotion to Mammon, in which the name of God is never mentioned, in which the Church is forgotten, in which every religious impulse is annihilated? One or the other of the enthusiasms we must have—an enthusiasm of life (and it is hardly a contradiction in terms so to say) or an enthusiasm in death. Christians must not allow themselves to be too easily rebuked: they must rather say with the Apostle, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause." Israel could hardly have gods enough. There is a marvellous licence in irreligion. Even Cicero said it was not sufficient for the majesty of Rome to have but one god; Rome must have a multitude of gods, said he, for reasons of State. There is then enthusiasm in idolatry; a keeping up of idolatry to its very highest pitch. These revivals are published, too. The idolaters were not ashamed to say to how many gods they had bowed down. Is all courage to be on the side of the opposition? and are Christians to sit down in the quietness of death, because they are afraid of the criticism of the world?

"And the anger of the Lord [compare 1 Sam. xii. 9] was hot against Israel, and he sold them [or, gave them up] into the hands of the Philistines, and into the hands of the children of Ammon. And that year [imperfect, as no year is specified] they vexed and oppressed the children of Israel: eighteen years, all the children of Israel that were on the other side Jordan in the land of the Amorites [the kingdoms of Og and Sihon], which is in Gilead. Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed" (vv. 7-9).

Desperate diseases require desperate remedies. The Lord said in effect: If you will have the gods of the Philistines, you may

take the Philistines also ; if you will have the gods of heathen, you may have the whole yoke of heathendom to carry : you must not pick and choose, taking out the gods and leaving the customs, following the idolatry and escaping the tyranny. This is the reason why the Lord sends upon us all manner of evil,—because we have forsaken him. We may not have forsaken him nominally, but there is a forsaking that is worse than a merely nominal and formal renunciation. A man may not be forsaken in any public or mechanical manner by his family, but if they neglect him, if they allow him to mourn in his loneliness, and to cry in the bitterness of an unrelieved solitude,—if they hear his complaints without replying to them, he is indeed forsaken. It is impossible, therefore, to have a church, and an altar, and a merely nominal God, and a creed full of points innumerable, and yet never to turn the living, loving heart to the Father in heaven. Providence is full of chastisement in relation to evil-doers. The Lord is very pitiful and kind, but pity may be exhausted, and kindness may come to an end. So health is broken ; the strong man is bowed down ; those who were proud of their vigour have now to sigh their wants because they cannot express them in words. And the business is all broken up. Nobody can account for it. All the arrangements have been as usual ; every appointment has been kept ; attention has been paid to the whole circle ; but there is no response : everything goes wrong ; every figure is turned into a cipher, old books become practically blank. And bereavement is sent,—the choice one is taken away, the best one dies, and the bird with the brightest wing takes flight ; the sweetest singer becomes dumb. And the way is shut up ; yet no man can see where the bars are : there is no gate of wood or brass or iron that can be touched, for then it might be broken through or opened ; but the air is full of bars, and we cannot make any progress. We earn wages, and put them into bags with holes in them. Is God always going to allow himself to be mocked ? The point of sovereignty must be found somewhere : shall it be found in the riotous mob, God-forgetting, God-insulting ; or in the eternal unchangeable throne of righteousness ? Blessed be God for broken health, depressed trade, graves without number, ways that are barred up with invisible iron, if our use of these things should lead us to thought, repentance, and better life. Israel was “ sore

distressed." There is a moral in agony. It is not every pain that will make a man pray. Some pain may be treated lightly, referred to as a momentary inconvenience ; but the pain becomes sharper, the agony more burning, the fire more intolerable, and men who thought they could not pray are made to "cry," for they are "sore distressed." Do not let us suppose that we can outrun or outwit the living God. He will overtake us, and trip us, and scourge us, and it shall be found that among the multitude of the deities there has been in reality but one God.

"And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord ["cried they had before, as very brutes will do when they are hurt, but not with their whole heart; their cries were the fruits of the flesh for ease, not of faith for God's favour"] saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim" (v. 10).

That is a true conception of the case. Both the points are put effectively. Not only was there a forsaking of God, but there was a taking up with Baalim. Men cannot throw off their church robe without putting on some other garment. It is impossible simply to "leave the church." Yet there are men who deceive themselves with the idea that they have simply given up attendance upon religious duties and observance—have merely withdrawn from church appointment and action: nothing else has occurred. That is a profound mistake. No man leaves the true Church, wherever and whatever it may be,—no man abandons its ceremonies and observances and duties without exposing himself to a thousand assaults and temptations: he is more easily trifled with; he listens more eagerly to temptations which appeal to his ambition or his cupidity. He who goes down in veneration goes down in every faculty of his nature that pointed towards heaven or aspired after nobler life. Israel proved this. Having forsaken God, Israel took up with Baalim, with all the gods of the heathen; with many gods—yea, countless in number—absolutely forgetting the true God. There are losses which never can be made up. Loss of character is never made up by gain of wealth: there is no correspondence between the two quantities. Loss of the true God cannot be amended by the multiplication of false gods. The many do not total into the one.

Now comes a sad word. The Lord said in the course of his reply,—

“Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation” (v. 14). [Compare very carefully Deut. xxxii. 37, 38; 2 Kings iii. 13; Jer. ii. 28.]

We do not wonder at the “cry.” The wonder is in heaven, not in man: the wonder is that we have anything, not that we are left with a solitary staff; the surprise is that we have a coal in the grate, or a loaf in the cupboard, not that we die of cold and perish with hunger. The taunting word we must all approve, if it comes to a question of bare justice, fair and honourable revenge. But when God laughs the universe grieves. “I also will laugh at your calamity.” Who can bear it? There is a laughter which we can return with disdain equal to its own contempt. But there is another laughter, the laughter of mocked love, the laughter of avenging affection, the laughter of dishonoured holiness: who can abide its scorn? “I also will laugh at your calamity,” I will refer you to the gods you have served; I will say, “Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened.” Cry aloud! “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace.” The day of “sore distress” overtakes every life. Is the Lord Jesus Christ only to be sought after when everything gets darkened, and when the pathways round about the house are so treated as to prevent any noise reaching the dying life? Is he never to be invited to the wedding, where he would make the water wine? Is he never to come to the evening feast, where all the children would grow in his presence like flowers opening in the sun? Is he never to go out with us into the fields, golden with vernal and summer flowers? Is he never to be invited into the best rooms of the house, but always to be kept outside until he is asked into the chamber darkened because light means pain, and only to be spoken to when we need something from him? The question is a solemn one, and the answer is with ourselves. The voice of warning we have heard; the voice of redemption we have also listened to. “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” Keep to your god! If Baalim be god, keep to him, serve him; if the Lord be God,

cleave unto him with full purpose of heart. That the Lord is God we know—we know in our heart, in our best feeling, in our least-perverted instincts; that there is a throne in the universe we know by the history of humanity upon the face of the earth,—a living Bible, a moving apocalypse, and obvious inspiration. Many deliverers have arisen, many redeemers have appeared in time of stress and sorrow, but each of them has said in mysterious language, “I am not he: there cometh one after me.” We pass through a whole array of deliverers, emancipators, soldiers, ardent in patriotism,—the meaning of them all being that there is one coming whose name is Jesus Christ. He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. In heavenly vision I see him, and on his vesture and on his thigh is written, “KING OF KINGS, LORD OF LORDS.” On his head are many crowns, and all heaven is filled with the thunder of his praise. Be Christ our captain. Be the Son of God our infinite deliverer.

SELECTED NOTE.

“*The children of Ammon passed over Jordan*” (v. 9). These were the descendants of the younger son of Lot (Gen. xix. 38). They originally occupied a tract of country east of the Amorites, and separated from the Moabites by the river Arnon. It was previously in the possession of a gigantic race called Zamzummims (Deut. ii. 20), “but the Lord destroyed them before the Ammonites, and they succeeded them and dwelt in their stead.” The first mention of their active hostility against Israel occurs in Judges iii. 13: “The king of Moab gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel.” About one hundred and forty years later we are informed that the children of Israel forsook Jehovah and served the gods of various nations, including those of the children of Ammon, “and the anger of Jehovah was hot against them, and he sold them into the hands of the Philistines and of the children of Ammon” (x. 7). The Ammonites crossed over the Jordan, and fought with Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim, so that “Israel was sore distressed.” In answer to Jephthah’s messengers (xi. 12), the king of Ammon charged the Israelites with having taken away that part of his territories which lay between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, which, in Joshua xxiii. 25, is called “half the land of the children of Ammon,” but was in the possession of the Amorites when the Israelites invaded it; and this fact was urged by Jephthah in order to prove that the charge was ill-founded. Jephthah “smote them from Aroer to Minnith, even twenty cities, with a very great slaughter” (xi. 33). In the writings of the prophets terrible denunciations are uttered against the Ammonites on account of their rancorous hostility to the people of Israel; and the destruction of their metropolis, Rabbah, is distinctly foretold (Zeph. ii. 8; Jer. xlix. 1-6; Ezek. xxv. 1-5, 10; Amos i. 13-15).

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, it is our joy to know that thou art on the throne, and that thy judgment is true and righteous altogether. We trust our all to thee, for thou didst give us all. The mystery of our being we cannot understand; but when it is most painful, we see how truly great is thy meaning towards us. Surely thou didst not make man in vain; thou didst purpose concerning him great glory and honour, because great service, in the spheres which thou thyself wilt appoint. Some come into the world under infinite disadvantages; still, they are thy children; thou knowest their whole story; thou wilt not leave them without a friend; the burden is very heavy, the cloud is very threatening, but the Lord reigneth, and his name is Love. They wonder why they are here; they dare not escape from the little prison; they would gladly do so, but thou hast wrought within them the mystery of patience, which most sweetly says, Not my will, but thine, be done. And others are crowned with advantages which they cannot use: they are filled with pride and haughtiness, and the self-trust which they boast is only idolatry; they cannot tell the meaning of all the riches with which thou hast crowded their life: behold, their wealth is multitudinous, and they listen not to the cry of the poor, nor understand the pain of necessity. Others thou hast gifted until their gifts become temptations and snares, and seem to lie close to the dread region of madness; thou dost give them dreams they cannot realise, and flash upon their eyes visions which dazzle them; they seem to be able to pluck what they want, and yet they just fall short of the tempting fruit. So life is very hard to some men, most difficult, full of pleasure, full of pain—a great distress; the joy seems to be occasional, the sorrow permanent; the delight is but for a moment, and then the bright heavens close again in great thunder-clouds. Yet still thou hast so made us that we cling to life. Herein is a great mystery. We cannot give it up. We still hope that to-morrow will redeem to-day, and that in the coming gladness we shall forget the sorrow that is gone. So we stand in a great mystery. Come to us with the light of Christianity, the glory of the Cross, the revelation of thy love in Christ Jesus thy Son. May he bring life and immortality to light, and show us that in the by-and-bye, which we hope for under the name of Heaven, we shall see thy purpose, and glorify thy goodness, and say thou hast done all things well. Amen.

Judges xi.

[“The history of Jephthah appears to be an independent history inserted bodily by the compiler of the Book of Judges. For it is obvious that vv. 4, 5, introduce the Ammonitish war without any apparent reference to chap. x. 17, 18, though in perfect agreement with what is there related.”—*The Speaker's Commentary*.]

Annotated Text.

(Giving the results of the best available criticism.)

1. Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat [may mean, was the ancestor of] Jephthah.

2. And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah [in perfect accordance with the law, see Deut. xxiii. 2, 3], and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.

3. Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob [a Syrian district on the north-east of Peræa]; and there were gathered vain ["These are exactly analogous to the *doruphoroi*,—a body guard of spear-bearers, which an ambitious Greek always hired as the first step to setting up a tyranny. We find David (1 Sam. xxii. 2), and Absalom (2 Sam. xv. 1), and Rezon (1 Kings xi. 24), and Adonijah (1 Kings i. 5), and Jeroboam (2 Chron. xiii. 7), all doing the same thing."] men to Jephthah, and went out with him [as fellow freebooters].

4. And it came to pass in process of time [after days], that the children of Ammon made war against Israel [this has been fully related in chap. x].

5. And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel [at the close of eighteen years of oppression, chap. x. 9], the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

6. And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain [our leader in time of war], that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

7. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

8. And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

9. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord deliver them before me, shall I be your head? [more than merely leader in times of war.]

10. And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The Lord be witness [be hearing] between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

11. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain [civil as well as military leader] over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh [by some solemn religious ceremony].

12. And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? [He speaks officially in the name of all Israel.]

13. And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land [plausible, but not factual], when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok [the space

occupied by Gad and Reuben], and unto Jordan : now, therefore, restore those lands again peaceably.

14. And Jephthah sent messengers again [because he disputed the king's facts] unto the king of the children of Ammon :

15. And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon : ["What they took was the territory of Sihon which they had never been forbidden to take, and had, indeed, been forced to take by Sihon's attack upon them."]

16. But when Israel came up from Egypt [compare Numb. xx, xxi.], and walked through the wilderness [in the second year of the wanderings] unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh ;

17. Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom [as narrated in Numb. xx. 14, etc.], saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land : but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab : but he would not consent : and Israel abode in Kadesh [where they may have encamped for a great part of forty years].

18. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab : for Arnon was the border of Moab.

19. And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon [king of the Amorites by birth, king of Heshbon by conquest] ; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

20. But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast : but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

21. And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them : so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

22. And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

23. So now the Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it ? [a theological as well as a military view.]

24. Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god ["The expression shows the close connection between Ammon and Moab. Chemosh was distinctively the god of Moab, and Molech of Ammon : but the two nations were of kindred blood and allied institutions."] giveth thee to possess ? So whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

25. And now art thou any thing better than Balak [are you the good, good in comparison with ?] the son of Zippor, the king of Moab ? did he ever strive against Israel [except with pure hatred], or did he ever fight against them,

26. While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years ? [An argument drawn from undisputed possession. The

time mentioned may be a marginal gloss which has crept into the text] why therefore did ye not recover them within that time [at that crisis]?

27. Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the Lord the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. [A familiar appeal. See Gen. xvi. 5, xxxi. 53, xviii. 25; 1 Sam. xxiv. 15.]

28. Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

29. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah [endowing him with courage and wisdom], and he passed over ["he swept through the land from end to end to kindle the torch of war, and raise the population"] Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mipzeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon [went to attack them].

30. And Jephthah vowed a vow ["A practice among all ancient nations, but especially among the Jews: Gen. xxviii. 20-22; 1 Sam. i. 11; 2 Sam. xv. 8; Ps. lxi. 13."] unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

31. Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth ["Jephthah ignorant as he was,—being a man of semi-heathen parentage, and long familiarised with heathen surroundings—contemplated a human sacrifice." St. Augustine ridicules the idea that there is any reference to a mere animal.] of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.

32. So [And] Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord delivered them into his hands.

33. And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith [Maanith, four miles from Heshbon], even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

34. And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: [As Miriam went to meet Moses (Exod. xv. 20); and the women to meet Saul and David (1 Sam. xviii. 6, 7)] and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

35. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes ["Every Jew on approaching Jerusalem for the first time has to submit to the *Krie*, i.e., to a cut made in his sleeve, as a sort of symbol of rending his clothes."], and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low [crushing, thou hast crushed me], and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord [a vow to be binding, must have been actually expressed in words], and I cannot go back [no room was left for mental reservations: Lev. xxvii. 28, 29].

36. And she said unto him, My father, if [omit if] thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

37. And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: Let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, [The thought most intolerable to a Hebrew maiden was

to die unwedded and childless. In this case there was additional bitterness because she was an only child, and in her early death prophecy would seem to come to nought.] I and my fellows.

38. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

39. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed [offered her up for a burnt offering]: and she knew no man. And it was a custom ⁱⁿ Israel [the Targum of Jonathan adds—"in order that no one should make his son or his daughter a burnt offering as Jephthah did, and did not consult Phinehas the priest," who would have redeemed her with money],

40. That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament [to praise or celebrate] the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

JEPHTHAH.

JEPHTHAH was an illegitimate son. His brethren were cruel to him: they thrust him out, and said unto him, "Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman." (v. 2). So the man was driven away. That is the first picture. The man was unfortunate, not criminal. He was the victim of circumstances. Why should society be so cruel? Is a man to be blamed because he was born blind? Who does not thrust the cripple away when there is a great feast, or a grand show, or some occasion of family pride and delight? Who does not hide the thing that is unpleasant? This is the mystery of society—that we should fix responsibility where there is none, and be very light in our thought concerning responsibility where it is evident and incommunicable—that is to say, where it is fastened upon the individual and cannot be transferred to any other person. There is something wrong here in social thought. Who does not gather himself up in a kind of conscious or unconscious disdain and look severely and repudiatingly upon a man who has come into the world under infinite disadvantages? We should show a better quality if we were more kindly disposed towards such, saying to them in effect: Poor souls! you had a bad beginning; the time will go heavy with you; you have somehow come into a world that is lacking in compassion and magnanimity; but, in God's name, some of us will stand by you, and help you, and make the world as glad for you as we can. That would be noble chivalry; that would be

the very Spirit of Christ. So Jephthah is doomed to everlasting obscurity : is he ? The Lord is very pitiful and kind. Jephthah was disreputable in birth, but he was illustrious in faith. That is your opportunity ! However you came into the world you may go out of it a gentleman, a hero, a saint. Says the Apostle : " What shall I more say ? for the time will fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah." So when his mocking brothers or alien kin are all forgotten, the bastard Jephthah stands out elect, precious—a mighty man in faith as in valour. Cheer ye ! you may yet have a time of gladness. There is no difficulty that is not conquerable. Many a time your disadvantages will be thrown in your face. When you are advancing with terrific pace upon the foremost men and threatening to overrun them, they will not forget your birth and your disadvantages. Every one of them will be turned into a stone, which will be thrown at you, but not one of the stones will strike you. Never mind what is thrown—have your purpose right and good, and God will defend you.

So " Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob " (v. 3)—perhaps in the land of his maternal ancestors. There is room enough in the world. Do not crowd one another so. If there is a family difference, a disagreement of a painful kind, you will find that Space may be turned into a kind of reconciliation. Divide, separate : there is wonderful healing in fresh air, and in new sunshine, and in new scenery and surroundings. If you are thrust out, it may be the making of you. Some men would have been better to-day if they had been driven from home. They have grown not one visible inch during the last quarter of a century. A little hardship would have been the making of them ; it would have awakened them all through and through, so that most of them would not have been asleep, but every faculty would have become a burning point, a centre of new vitality. Jephthah went, and he left the shame with his brothers. That must be the law of life, if we would follow Christ. Behave you like a gentleman, however much others may mock you and persecute you. Let the shame be theirs ! Wear them out by the very patience of goodness ; be so constant in all nobleness, truth, honour, and genuine goodness, that at last they will give up, saying, Truly this man is a son of

God ! Marvellous are the healings of time and space, mountains and seas.

Was there, then, no compensation ? Was there nothing but disadvantage in the life of Jephthah ? The question turns us back again to the first verse :—"Now Jephthah . . . was a mighty man of valour." Even his mother might not be without great qualities. Surely the mother lives again in the son. She was a giantess of a mother, fit to be the mother of kings. Do not scatter your contempt about too freehandedly. You cannot tell whom you are undervaluing, and whom you are attempting to deride. Your virtue may consist of some one point of respectability, and the person you condemn may be a person whose shoe's latchet you are not worthy to unloose. God knows what is in every man, woman, and child. He does not fix his eye upon little points or great, but takes in the whole man, the entire life, in its whole bulk and weight and force. Jephthah has a fortune in himself. The young man who went out from his father's house with the portion of goods that fell to him, had a fortune in his hand, not in his head—not in his heart ; and whatever is in the hand only may be spent, for there is nothing so easy as spending : any fool can learn the art without a premium. Jephthah's fortune was internal, spiritual ; within him, in his mind, not yet awakened : for that gigantic body habited a mind worthy of itself. Study the law of compensations. If a dozen boys are playing at a game, and there is a cripple amongst them, the cripple is the winning man ; nothing can stand before the cripple ; all the handsome boys will be behind. You may have seen this again and again. It seems to be a kind of law of nature. Where a man is unable to speak much, you should see one of his letters—every sentence meaning something, and there is more in one page of his letters than in all the epistles some of the most fluent speakers ever wrote. See a man who is very timid under some circumstances, and that same man may be as bold as a lion under others : in the first instance the circumstances were not equal to the man—they did not awake him ; the latter appealed to his best quality. So it is all through and through life. The unsuccessful man may have a happy temperament, which is worth a very great amount as to quietness and happiness and music. God hath not left any of his creatures without some token of blessing, some point of

light, some gift all his own. Search for that particular gift, and make it the beginning of heaven. You may be driven out, but how strong you are! You may be derided by others, but how wonderfully you can take care of yourself! Look at the bright side, and though you be driven into far-away lands, yet, with a soul touching God's great economies, and drawing out of them all nutriment and inspiration, every land is home.

Now came a period of trial. The brethren got into trouble: "The children of Ammon made war against Israel" (v. 5). But a bastard might not reign in Israel; so it was written in the law. Jephthah, therefore, must keep out of the way; the captaincy is forbidden to him. There were social reasons for this, strong enough for their time, adapted to the civilisation which they ruled. What, then, was to be done? A provision was made for overgetting the difficulty. Such a man must be called to the captaincy by the elders. Hence we find "the elders of Gilead," including the brethren, in a formal and official manner "went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob" (v. 5). Now we see a turn in the wheel of Providence which is not unusual. The elders said unto Jephthah, "Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon" (v. 6). Jephthah was but a man; who can be more, unless he be crucified with Christ—unless the life he now live in the flesh be a life of faith of the Son of God? "And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?" (v. 7). Your opportunity will come, and you will feel that question though you may not ask it. When men are in distress they seem almost inspired to be able to find out one's address. We think we are well concealed, and it will be impossible for any person whom we wish to avoid to find out where we are; but there is a kind of invisible directory they get hold of, and as soon as the wolf is upon them they are upon us. Who could keep back the question, "Why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?"—remember the old times when you were hard with me, and thrust me away, hardly giving me a garment with which to cover my shoulders, sending me away from my father's house without a blessing or a cheer, without

one word of prayer or benediction, without a single "God bless you" to shorten the road and brighten the end; why are ye come to me now? If we push the question too much, we shall show that we are unworthy of the honour which is sought to be conferred upon us. Joseph showed a right spirit when he said to his brethren, "Now, therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves. . . . It was not you . . . but God." Jephthah was not so well instructed. Presently we shall find that he did not know the law of Israel, for if he had known it he would have saved himself infinite pain. How could Jephthah know the law? We thrust men out of their houses, drive them away into far lands, and then blame them for not being as civilised as we are, as highly educated, as fully trained. This is the evil way of the human spirit when it is not subdued and sanctified. We give men no chances, we turn them out into the bare desert, we treat them as if they were of inferior quality: and then if they make a slip or mistake, or commit offence, we charge them with ignorance of the law. We first make the heathen, then we deride him, and at last we feebly attempt to convert him! Have we not driven away many? What this land has to answer for, and many other lands, in the way of exiling men from their natural positions and opportunities! Surely the day must come when our Christian preachers will not be afraid to read and preach the *whole* Bible. When that day comes there will be a sword in the country, there will be a fire in the earth! Now we read the comforting promises, the tender exhortations, we apply all the needful solaces, and call such reading and preaching honouring the Bible! There is no fire so hot as the fire that burns in God's Book, in relation to all sin, injustice, irrational and oppressive inequality. The wrath of the Lamb is such wrath as cannot burn in evil breasts. Jephthah said, "If ye bring me home again"—we cannot get rid of that word "home"; it follows us into the land of Tob, and into every land, and makes a song for itself—"to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord deliver them before me, shall I be your head? And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The Lord be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words" (vv. 9-10.) It is really a pitiful moment when one gets the better of the enemy. There is something so crouching in the humiliation of

the foe that we almost wish the conquest had never been effected. The elders of Israel would do anything, give anything, promise anything, if this great Samson in anticipation would only come and deliver them from the children of Ammon.

Then came the battle and the victory. Jephthah stated his case in a statesmanlike manner (vv. 12-27, *ante*, p. 71).

There is nothing furious in the claim ; history is stated, victories are avouched, and a claim is made. Jephthah wishes to be strong in justice. If a man is not morally strong even an arm of iron may be broken and sinews of brass may be melted. Have right on your side. That is the coat-of-mail. There is no crevice in it. Let the arrows come with the thickness of rain ; they will fall harmlessly at your feet. Jephthah was a superstitious man, not well trained in the law. How could he be ? He was full of a wild kind of superstition. "Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon" (v. 29)—passed like a mighty tempest ! Who can arrest a man who is made mad by the divine presence ? He was not inspired in the prophetic or apostolic sense of the term, but he was "possessed" ; he was no more himself, but a tabernacle of the living God. He had a purpose to realise, and God was in him that that purpose might be consummated.

Jephthah made a vow. He said that whoever came out of his house when he returned should be offered in sacrifice (vv. 30-31). "And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances : and she was his only child ; beside her he had neither son nor daughter" (v. 34). Here he was just as steadfast as at the earlier points of his history. There is a wonderful consistency about the man. When he saw the child, "he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter ! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me ; for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back" (v. 35). So he was a great man even in his heathenism. But he did not know the law, we have said. If he had been allowed to

remain at home, and to study the law and acquaint himself with the ordinances of Israel, he might have known that provision was made for this very crisis. Oh, had one been at hand that day to whisper in his ear, "And if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels" (Levit. xxvii. 4)! Jephthah did not know that in the law there was mercy hidden. Jephthah was not aware that all the great necessities of life have been anticipated by providential economies, and that heaven's great, sweet law provides against the rashness and the madness into which we are plunged by our sin. For "thirty shekels" he could have redeemed his vow, and his only child might have been spared! Search the Bible for the way out of your difficulty. Everything is in the Book of God. Whatever your sorrow or strait, sit down to the inspired volume and read it until you find the gate that opens upon liberty; it is unquestionably in the Bible. All the deepest questions man has ever asked were answered before they were propounded. Who can be before the Lord, or prevent the Eternal?

Into the mystery of what then happened we cannot enter. The daughter was worthy of the father. She said, "If thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth" (v. 36). We sometimes understand fathers best by studying the children. Jephthah's child had in her the making of a great woman. So the compensations of Providence are a million in number. They come upon a man at unexpected points, and they cheer him in the most critical distresses. Jephthah might have felt himself filled with a pride pleasing to heaven, as he heard his child utter this sublime reply. Men are sacrificing their daughters to-day in quite as heathenish a manner as Jephthah ever sacrificed his only child. There is less hope of them. They have passed through Moses and the prophets, the evangelists and the apostles, in so far as their moral teaching is concerned; and the men in question have come out of the process more obdurate and worldly than ever. Are there not men to-day who are saying, If I can marry my child to a rich man I shall be satisfied; no matter what his belief, no matter what his conduct, wealth is the one condition? Such men are cruel; they are not fit to live. They may not put the case to themselves quite so boldly; they may throw a good

deal of social decoration around their proposals; but if at the heart of those proposals there is this idea of wealth, then truly their condemnation is just. There is only one thing perhaps worse than this, and that is that a daughter should vow herself away on this mean altar. But are there not people who are saying, If there is wealth, no matter what else there is or is not? What can come of an association of that kind, but disappointment, bitterness, death? Are there not some also who are saying: I dedicate my children to enjoyment; they must have a good opportunity in the world, for life is brief and chances are few, and they must not be brought up to slave as I have slaved: they must be saved from hard work, and drudgery, and humiliation; they shall run with the footmen and outstrip the horsemen in the race of time? Poor fools! they, too, are cruel. There is no kindness like the kindness of bringing up a child to work. He ought to be punished by society who leaves his child without a trade or a means of obtaining an honest living. These are the vices to frown down. These are the injustices that ought to be put down. The children will arise to condemn the memory that ought to have been for ever kept clean. Dedicate your children to honesty, industry, self-reliance, sobriety, honour. Tell them there is a poverty which is wealth, and a wealth which is poverty: a repute which is infamous, and a repudiation of a social kind which amounts to a real crowning and enthronement. If we cannot look for these things from Christian people, from whom can we expect them? This is the Spirit of Christ. In all things he was our example—in making his living, in giving an equivalent for everything he received, in giving himself for the life of the world. "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them." "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." I know of no cruelty so great as to substitute a momentary kindness for a lifelong discipline. Let us learn that every direction suited to the education and development of human life is to be found in the Book of God. He who walks by this book will walk straight into heaven; he will make no permanent mistakes; he may sometimes have a rod in his hand; sometimes his face may be darkened by a frown; sometimes his voice may tremble with menace; but, pursuing the course of education marked down in God's Book, at the last his children shall bless him, and they

will speak with their father's enemies in the gate, if he should ever need to be vindicated or his honour to be upheld. Let us stand by the Bible—preach, read, study, proclaim the Bible. Human life has no necessity that has not been anticipated by the living Book of the living God.

SELECTED NOTE.

Volumes have been written on the subject of "Jephthah's rash vow;" the question being whether, in doing to his daughter "according to his vow," he really did offer her in sacrifice or not. The negative has been stoutly maintained by many able pens, from a natural anxiety to clear the character of one of the heroes in Israel from so dark a stain. But the more the plain rules of common sense have been exercised in our view of Biblical transactions, and the better we have succeeded in realizing a distinct idea of the times in which Jephthah lived and of the position which he occupied, the less reluctance there has been to admit the interpretation which the first view of the passage suggests to every reader, which is, that he really did offer her in sacrifice. The explanation which denies this maintains that she was rather doomed to perpetual celibacy, and this, as it appears to us, on the strength of phrases which to one who really understands the character of the Hebrew people and their language suggest nothing more than that it was considered a lamentable thing for any daughter of Israel to die childless. To *live* unmarried was required by no law, custom, or devotion among the Jews; no one had a right to impose so odious a condition on another, nor is any such condition implied or expressed in the vow which Jephthah uttered. To get rid of a difficulty which has no place in the text, but arises from our reluctance to receive that text in its obvious meaning, we invent a new thing in Israel, a thing never heard of among the Hebrews in ancient or modern times, and more entirely opposed to their peculiar notions than anything which the wit of man ever devised, such as that a damsel should be consecrated to perpetual virginity in consequence of a vow of her father, which vow itself says nothing of the kind. If people allow themselves to be influenced in their interpretations of Scripture by dislike to take the words in their obvious meaning, we might at least expect that the explanations they would have us receive should be in accordance with the notions of the Hebrew people, instead of being entirely and obviously opposed to them. The Jewish commentators themselves generally admit that Jephthah really sacrificed his daughter; and even go so far as to allege that the change in the pontifical dynasty from the house of Eleazar to that of Ithamar was caused by the high-priest of the time having suffered this transaction to take place.

Professor Bush maintains with us that a human sacrifice was all along contemplated. But he suggests that during the two months, Jephthah might have obtained better information respecting the nature of vows, by which he would have learned that his daughter could not be legally offered, but might be redeemed at a valuation (Lev. xxvii. 2-12). This is possible, and is much more likely than the popular alternative of perpetual celibacy; but we have serious doubts whether even this meets the conclusion that "he did with her according to his vow." Besides, in this case, where was the ground for the annual "lamentations" of the daughters of Israel, or even for the "celebrations" which some understand the word to mean?—*Kitto*.

Judges xii.

1. And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together [literally, were called together; the same phrase in chap. vii. 23, 24], and went northward [in order to cross the Jordan fords. Mizpeh in Gilead lay to the north-east of the tribe of Ephraim], and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us ["the tribe of Ephraim throughout the book of Judges is represented in a most unenviable light." Compare the similar complaint of the Ephraimites to Gideon, chap. viii. 1; see also Josh. xvii. 14-18] to go with thee? We will burn thine house upon thee with fire [that is, we will burn thee alive in thy house; a threat which shows somewhat the wildness of the times. See a similar threat in chap. xiv. 15, and an execution of it in chap. xv. 16. Burning was a mode of capital punishment; see Gen. xxxviii. 24; Josh. xvii. 25].

2. And Jephthah said unto them, I and my people were at great strife with the children of Ammon [literally, I was a man of strife, I and my people, and the children of Ammon exceedingly. For a similar phrase, see Jer. xv. 10]; and when I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. [The Ephraimites held themselves selfishly aloof. When Jephthah says, "I called you," he speaks in the person of Gilead or of the Gileadites].

3. And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands [in the hollow of my hand], and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivered them into my hand [Jephthah makes his appeal to Jehovah]: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day [for the phrase "come up," see chap. i. 1-16], to fight against me?

4. Then Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead [under great provocation. By "the men of Gilead," understand the eastern tribes generally], and fought with Ephraim: and the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because they said [here the translation and meaning are regarded by eminent critics as highly uncertain: one says that it seems to be "implied that in spite of Jephthah's perfectly reasonable answer the Ephraimites advanced to attack Gilead, and goaded the Gileadites to fury by intolerable taunts, which prevented the Gileadites from giving any quarter when they had won the victory"], Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim [an extremely obscure passage. *The Speaker's Commentary* gives the following as the most grammatically correct and natural rendering of this and the two following verses: "The men of Gilead smote Ephraim, for they, the Gileadites, said, Ye are fugitives to Ephraim (Gilead lies between Ephraim and Manasseh); and Gilead took the fords of Jordan before Ephraim, and it came to pass,

when the fugitives of Ephraim said, Let me pass over, and the Gileadites asked him, Art thou an Ephraimite? and he answered, No; then said the Gileadites to him, Say Shibboleth, etc., so they, the Gileadites, slew them at the ford of Jordan], among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites.

5. And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan [because only through them could the Ephraimites escape to their own tribe] before the Ephraimites [literally, to Ephraim]: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped [fugitives to Ephraim. It has been suggested that a bitter retribution may be implied in these words. "The Ephraimites had taunted the eastern Manassites with being fugitives to Ephraim, and in the next verse they themselves appear to be in another but fatal sense fugitives to Ephraim] said, Let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay;

6. Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth [a ford; depth of waters; water-flood; channel]; and he said Sibboleth [according to *The Speaker's Commentary*, this is a curious instance of dialectic difference of pronunciation between the east and west Jordanic tribes. . . . The *sh* may have been as impossible for an Ephraimite to pronounce as *th* is to a Frenchman]: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. ["Archdeacon Farrar says, 'On May 25th, 1802, all the French were detected by their inability to pronounce the words, *scilt, end, friend*.'" Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan [the Arabic version says, they led him across, but the word means rather massacred, butchered]: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand [not necessarily that they were all butchered, but only that that was the number of the invading army; it may include the slain in battle and those killed at the fords; see chap. iv. 16].

7. And Jephthah judged Israel [his authority embracing all Israel after the subjugation of the Ephraimites] six years. Then died Jephthah the Gileadite, and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead [literally, in cities of Gilead; according to the LXX. in his city, Gilead,—that is, Ramoth-Gilead, or Mizpeh of Gilead].

8. And after him Ibzan [about whom nothing further is known than is found in these three verses; some have supposed him the same as Boaz] of Bethlehem [Josephus assumes that Bethlehem-Judah is here meant] judged Israel.

9. And he had thirty sons, and thirty daughters [implying polygamy, wealth, and great state. Compare 2 Kings x. 1 and Judg. viii. 30], whom he sent abroad [whom he gave in marriage out of his house], and took in thirty daughters from abroad for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years.

10. Then died Ibzan, and was buried at Bethlehem.

11. And after him Elon [the name means a Terebinth: it is customary for Orientals even now to name their children from trees. Archdeacon Farrar says that one of his muleteers in Palestine was named "Father of Olives"], a Zebulonite, judged Israel; and he judged Israel ten years.

12. And Elon the Zebulonite died, and was buried in Aijalon [a place in the tribe of Zebulun, not elsewhere mentioned: where the vowel-points are omitted, the names Elon and Aijalon are identical in Hebrew] in the country of Zebulun.

13. And after him Abdon [*servant*] the son of Hillel [praising. The Rabbi called Hillel is regarded as by far the greatest and best of the Rabbis], a Pirathonite [and therefore of the tribe of Ephraim], judged Israel.

14. And he had forty sons and thirty nephews [the Hebrew has, *sons of sons*: the word "nephews" in our version always means *grandsons*, "nieces" is a word which means *granddaughters* in Wyclif's Bible], that rode on threescore and ten ass colts [implying wealth and distinction]: and he judged Israel eight years.

15. And Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died, and was buried in Pirathon [now called Feratah, six miles west of Shechem] in the land of Ephraim, in the mount of the Amalekites [pointing to an early settlement of Amalekites in Central Palestine. "The twenty-five years, apparently consecutive ones, occupied by the judgeship of Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon, seem to have been very uneventful and prosperous, since the only record of them preserved in the annals of their country relates to the flourishing families and peaceful magnificence of two of their number. . . . Jephthah's victory over the enemies of Israel was followed by twenty-five years of peace under three judges. . . . All the three belong to the western tribes. The first from Bethlehem, the second from Zebulun, and the third from Ephraim.]

[The venerable John Trapp, remarking on verse 6, says, "They were discerned by their lisping, their dialect betrayed them. How many have we that can hardly lisp out a syllable of good language, and if they attempt it, falter fearfully." On verse 14 he quaintly remarks, "In Persia the peasant never rideth; the gentleman never goeth on foot, but fighteth, tradeth, conferreth, doeth, all on horseback."]

SHIBBOLETH.

WE have just inquired, Is Abimelech dead? and to that inquiry we received a very decisive reply. Are the Ephraimites dead? Are they clean gone for ever? To this inquiry what reply can we discover in the history which is now before us? Why concern ourselves about an extinct tribe? Principally because we deny that the tribe is extinct. There are no extinct tribes where great moral characteristics and inspirations are concerned. Men die, but Man lives. The individual type seems to modify, and to pass away by development or by extinction, but a certain ground-line runs through all human history; there is a purpose in it, there is a grand central idea which abides. This we shall see if we study the history of Ephraim, as revealed in this incident connected with the war of Jephthah upon the children of Ammon.

Are the Ephraimites dead? Are they dead who are hard upon a man when he is in circumstances of extremity? Are they dead who do not fear to strike the last blow upon a man who is supposed to be staggering and to be unable to resist? Jephthah was exhausted. The war had been a triumphant one, but even triumph is succeeded by exhaustion. Prosperity takes out of a man the very energy which he was required to show in securing the honour. Great efforts are followed by great weaknesses. Added to this, there was a vow claiming execution. The only child was away upon the mountains on a two months' respite, and in this time of extremity and agony, proud and arrogant Ephraim came to ask a question and deliver a threatening. Are the Ephraimites, then, dead? Have they no successors? Are we now quite patient, after the manner of Christ, with men who are tired, for the moment outworn, and to whose physical exhaustion great mental prostration is added? If so—if there are no such men; if there are no such cruel proposals and demands; if there are no such untimely and aggravating threats, then the Ephraimites are dead, and shame be to the preacher who would exhume such men even that he might rebuke their forgotten wickedness.

Are the Ephraimites quite dead? Are there not men who cannot bear that anything should be done but by themselves—men who will deny the victory rather than award the merit? Are there not men who would not allow even the world to be converted but under their inspiration, and guidance, and co-operation? Are there Christian communions which deny to one another that they are accomplishing real and solid good in society? Is there a spirit of criticism which says, "The work may be only in appearance—a kind of superficial work is no doubt being done, but time will test and time will tell," a spirit which hampers and frets great Christian aggressions by narrow-minded and impious criticism? Ephraim could not bear that the battle should be won in which Ephraim had taken no part. We measure successes by the part which we ourselves have in them. If we were not in the fray, leading it, and causing it to issue in victory, how can we suppose that the fray was other than a tumult in which there was neither reason nor righteousness?

Are the Ephraimites quite dead? Are there not people who profess to be offended because they were not invited? Ephraim said, "Wherefore passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee?" (v. 1). We stand much upon the etiquette of invitation. We are so self-restrained, and so conscious of intolerable modesty, that unless we are properly invited to pray we will not worship God, and unless we are besought almost by deputation to take an interest in Christian service we will stand back in unchristian resentment. There are people who must be invited every day. What they suppose themselves to be it is almost impossible to tell. But they must be invited, entreated; the impression must be produced upon them that the universe would go out like a dying spark if they did not come to its patronage and sustenance. They have to be courted by the Church, waited upon, sedulously attended to. If a card should be sent to other people and not to them they would have no part or lot in the matter. Their dignity perish with them! They have no right to be in the Church. They are spots in the feast of charity. Who issues the invitations? The Lord. Whose battle is it? The battle is not yours, but God's. For whom do we work when we open the door, light the lamp, throw in the coin of charity? Is it for the minister—for some man? Then why this sensitiveness? Why this retirement to bed, and covering oneself up with all the clothes, and sweltering in an undeserved and unrecognised obscurity? Who called us to the service? Our call is from eternity. We respond to a divine decree and purpose, and as we were not born of men into this service we do not own their rulership: we are the sons of God, and we will work, whoever sends for us, or ignores us, or praises us. That is the spirit of consecration, and any other spirit in any man, in the pulpit or out of it, is not of God. Reason would be shocked were we to go into detail upon this matter. The childishness, the pettishness, the resentment, which we see in some poor souls, would discourage the strongest heart, were not our trust put in the living God. When such Ephraimites retire, are they any loss? Yes, they are: when they have gone we have lost folly, pride, petulance, arrogance and a great burden which we carried with a sense of intolerable pain.

Are the Ephraimites quite dead? Are they dead who have curiously forgotten their own faithlessness in the past? Jephthah said, "When I called you, ye delivered me not out of their hands. And when I saw that ye delivered me not, I put my life in my hands, and passed over against the children of Ammon, and the Lord delivered them into my hand" (vv. 2-3). Men curiously forget the invitations that they have actually received. They put them aside, because they were not willing to obey them; and having put them out of sight, they have put them out of memory; and having put them out of memory, they impiously deny their existence. The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Were the Ephraimites, then, so brave and bold and constant in all faithfulness that they should criticise the action of Jephthah? People should be very careful how they criticise. The popular proverb is a wise one which says, "They who live in glass houses should not throw stones." Jephthah remembered the case. He had not forgotten sending for the Ephraimites at a critical time in his history, and the Ephraimites paid no heed to his cry. We cannot always be sending for the men who are supposed to be neglected. There is a point at which common reason says, No; we will send no more for you. There is a point indeed at which decency can proceed no further. The people who have always to be sought, and always to be sent for, and always to be implored to come, will break the patience they have misunderstood, and will come to the ruin which they deserve.

Are the Ephraimites quite dead? Are they dead in whom envy culminates in revenge? "We will burn thine house upon thee with fire" (v. 1). They had better have reckoned with the enemy first. Some houses are not easily lighted. The spirit of men, however, is here clearly revealed. They envied Jephthah his honours, and envy has but a short distance to go to reach revenge. What will not envy do? Of what is it compounded? Of what hateful juices is that devil's cup made up,—envy, the spirit that has no generous word even for a friend, much less an antagonist; envy, that reduces everything that is done to the lowest possible point; envy, so critical in vision, so unjust in criticism; envy, that, serpent-like, entwines itself around the

heart, and transforms what ought to be a fountain of benevolence into a fountain of deadly bitterness? Envy cannot rest in mere criticism. Envy must do mischief: not only is there a condemnatory word, but there is a word of menace: the inward fire expresses itself in outward conflagration. Beware of the very first symptom of envy, jealousy! Cultivate the noble spirit,—the spirit of appreciation and recognition, and if in this respect you water others, you shall be divinely watered yourselves; your heart shall be as an abundant harvest field, laden with the very gold of heaven.

Are they dead who are insolent, who descend to the use of contemptuous taunts? If not, then the Ephraimites are not dead. The Ephraimites said to Jephthah and his tribe, "Ye Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites, and among the Manassites" (v. 4). You belong to neither one tribe nor another; ye upstarts, ye off-scouring, how dare you fight without asking us to lead you? That tribe can come to no good. Watch its history, and see whether such vaunting can end in honour. Are insolent men dead? the men who stealthily pick up stones and carry them until a suitable opportunity arises for throwing them at those who have outrun them and outfought them in the war? Are you ever reminded of your lowly parentage? Is it ever whispered that you were not born in royal circles? Does any adversary ever give the hint, quite in a Christian spirit, and in a fine and beautiful hypocrisy, that you were not born as highly and famously as he was, albeit the place of his birth has not to this day been discovered, though it might possibly have been found out if the lowest creature on earth had thought it worth while to put the vain and useless inquiry? Jephthah was stunned by this taunt. Many a man can bear a threat to have his house burned who cannot endure too much impertinence. Some noble natures have chafed under insolence who could have gone with some steadfastness even to martyrdom. Jephthah was roused. He now came to a kind of war he would have avoided if he could. So long as it was a heathenish war a battle with the enemy, he was equal to the occasion; but when the battle became internecine, of the nature of a family feud, partaking somewhat of the quality of civil war, his soul revolted.

So long as it was Ammon, the outward heathen enemy, he was not unprepared to go forward even alone to fight the foe. But who would enter into a family feud, a tribal dispute? Who would not rather half apologise, and explain as far as possible, and swallow somewhat, rather than play the foul game of Cain and Abel? Jephthah was quiet, almost as quiet as Gideon at the first when the same Ephraimites assailed him. Jephthah said: I did send for you; I wanted you to come; I did not forget your high position; but when ye did not come I put my life in my hand; I had my life on my palm, like a loose bird that might at any moment fly away, and in that condition I went out to fight Ammon, and I take no merit or undue praise to myself: "The Lord delivered them into my hand: wherefore then are ye come up unto me this day, to fight against me?" He reasons well! There is a touch of condescension in his reasoning which detracts nothing from its dignity and cogency. Presently they will go too far with him. Ephraim said, "Ye are but the fugitives of the tribes, ill-born, ill-bred; Ephraim will not have you; Manasseh will not have you; you are playing between the two, being outcast of both,—away with you!" It was enough! We shall see who was overthrown. The Gileadites took the fords of the Jordan, and said in effect, "Every man who passes here will have to give a good reason for his doing so." When any man said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead said unto him, "Art thou an Ephraimite?" Now we have come to real conflict. Apologies are no excuse at this point, nor explanations. Every man now holds his life who can hold it. If the man said, No, I am not an Ephraimite, they tested him: they said unto him, "Say now Shibboleth: and he said Sibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand." Do not interfere with divinely-qualified soldiers. They may expose themselves to your criticism now and again, but in so far as they are divinely qualified they will conquer at the last. There will be a period of apology and self-exculpation, there will be moments given up to explanatory statements; but let them alone, they cannot be slain. If you apply fire to their houses, the very houses will not burn. They must win, because they are sent of God.

Sometimes we misapply the use of this word Shibboleth—as, indeed, what do we not misapply when we come into the spiritual interpretation of the Bible? Now the phrase is used in this sense,—namely: if we cannot pronounce the Shibboleth of a sect we are regarded as heterodox. It has become quite a proverb amongst us, has this use of the word Shibboleth. Men defend themselves by saying one to another, Although we cannot pronounce your Shibboleth, we claim to be independent and accurate thinkers. The term Shibboleth has no relation whatever to that kind of remark. The test was put, not as a test of orthodoxy, but as a test of character, and is it not true that character is tested by little things? Regarding a Christian country, the men are comparatively few in number who are guilty of great crimes or aggravated transgressions against the state, or against one another. How many men could arise and indignantly repel great impeachments: but the question relates to little matters: and what can test character more than little experiments, minute utterances and observances? We may not have sinned against God, or against one another, in a manner that could be called romantic or tragical, but what about the little offences, the minor immoralities, the white lies, the leaving out the words of letters which give them their real meaning? What about mispronunciation, false accent, calculated emphasis so laid on as to give false colour to the thought that is being uttered? What about attitudes, postures, hints? What about unuttered defamations? What about “hesitated dislike”? It is along that line you know whether men can say Shibboleth or Sibboleth. The leaving out of a syllable changes the whole message; the introduction of false emphasis is destructive of integrity. Let us, therefore, examine ourselves in so-called little things and minute ceremonies and utterances: then what hand has not done the wrong deed? What tongue has not spoken in the wrong tone, if not in the wrong language? Who, then, can claim to be white-robed? Who can say of himself that his purity is like the snow, untrodden, and unstained? We must not recede from the application of such passages by limiting them to sectarian differences, or metaphysical contrasts; but follow out the exact line of the thought, and then we shall come to a test of *sincerity*, a test of truthfulness, a test of character,—we shall know whether

a man is trying to save his life at the expense of truth. The Ephraimite said in effect: "I will tell any number of lies, if you will only let me escape." But the Ephraimites have mocked the Gileadites—let them mock them *now*! So it shall be at the great upwinding of things. Sceptics, assailants, enemies of Christ and his cross, have yet to meet that same Christ in an official examination. The war does not end just now. All things are to be brought up for arbitrament and final decision, and we read of those who shall pray the rocks and the hills to fall upon them and hide them from the face—the wrath, the burning countenance—of the Lamb. We must be prepared for these test interviews and final examinations; then it will be seen that all pride, and arrogance, and insolence, and flippancy will have no reply in that day. Be wise ere the sun go down. Kiss the Son, while his anger is kindled but a little. If we have spoken haughtily even against the Son of God it may be forgiven us, if we repent with our hearts. He himself has said so. He never shut the door upon contrition, repentance, or attempts at restitution. Wherein we have been unjust to the Bible, unjust to the Church, unjust to Christ,—wherein we have been excusing ourselves from joining the war on petty grounds of not having been invited, let us repent this very day, call ourselves not only sinners, but fools in the sight of God for such a mean exculpation; and with one heart and mind and soul, let us say or sob, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, do thou bless us according to our need, and have mercy upon us according unto the multitude of our sins. Thy loving-kindnesses cannot be reckoned up: behold, they are more than the sands upon the sea-shore, and they exceed the stars in multitude. We live upon them: without them we could not live. We are fed by the mercy of the Lord; we are led by the light of his glory; we stand on the rocks which he has laid as foundations, and our whole life is rooted in his eternity. We look up unto heaven expectantly and gratefully. We love thee for all thou hast given, and we must continue to live upon thy regard for us. Thou hast redeemed us at a great cost: thou hast called us to the cross of the Saviour; thou hast made known unto us thy purpose to save our souls. We are therefore full of gladness, and a new song is in our mouth, and our expectation is from on high. We commit one another to thy tender care, for they are well kept whom thou dost keep. Lead us by still waters and in green pastures, and show us where thou dost make thy flock couch at noon; and may we always be in thine arm, or guided by thine eye, or sustained by thine hand. Let thy wisdom be within us a continual light, and thy grace an abiding hope. Make our way straight before our feet: bring down all high places; make all rough places smooth; lift up the valleys; and thus do thou, preparing a way for us, delight us with the city which is at the end. We bless thee for the hope of heaven—the all-completing world, the place all light, all purity, all love. We have heard of it with the hearing of the ear, and thou art daily satisfying us that it is more than eye hath seen or ear heard or heart conceived—the sublimest of thy wonders, a city worthy of thyself. Meanwhile help us to work more, to dig deeply, to do our present duty with both hands earnestly. May our eyes be in our head, may our hearts be true and loyal to God's doctrine, and in all the way of life may we know that to do is to learn, that to obey is to be instructed, and if we do the will we shall know the doctrine, and the mystery shall not appal us, but draw us on by a marvellous fascination. This life we want to live; this discipline we are prepared by thy Spirit to undergo. The Lord work in us all the good pleasure of his will, and the work of faith with power, and then call us into upper places to behold sights we cannot now see, and enter upon work which at present is too much for our poor strength. Amen.

Judges xiii.

1. And the children of Israel did evil again [see chap. iii. 7, iv. 1, vi. 1-11, x. 6] in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of the Philistines [who from this point to the reign of David play a most

important part. By Philistines we are not to understand Canaanites, but foreign conquerors; the name means *camp*s] forty years [terminating with the battle of Ebenezer, 1 Sam. vii. 13].

2. And there was a certain man of Zorah [*place of hornets*], of the family of the Danites [the words "family" and "tribe" are often used interchangeably. The tribe of Dan is said to have consisted of the single family of Shuham, Numb. xxvi. 42], whose name was Manoah [*rest*]; and his wife was barren, and bare not.

3. And the angel of the Lord appeared unto the woman, and said unto her, Behold now, thou art barren, and bearest not: but thou shalt conceive, and bear a son.

4. Now therefore beware, I pray thee, and drink not wine nor strong drink [intoxicating liquor not made from grapes], and eat not any unclean thing [a law which applied to all Israelites]:

5. For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head [see the law of the Nazarite in Num. vi.]: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines ["begin," but not complete: many men are permitted to begin good works, but they die without their full accomplishment].

6. Then the woman came and told her husband, saying, A man of God came unto me [angels always appear in human form], and his countenance was like the countenance of an angel of God, very terrible [see Matt. xxviii. 3, 4]: but I asked him not whence he was, neither told he me his name:

7. But he said unto me, Behold, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and now drink no wine nor strong drink, neither eat any unclean thing: for the child shall be a Nazarite [Samuel was also a Nazarite, so was John the Baptist, so was James the Lord's brother] to God from the womb to the day of his death.

8. Then Manoah intreated the Lord, and said, O my Lord, let the man of God which thou didst send come again unto us, and teach us [we should ask for second and completing inspirations] what we shall do unto the child that shall be born.

9. And God hearkened to the voice of Manoah; and the angel of God came again unto the woman as she sat in the field: but Manoah her husband was not with her.

10. And the woman made haste, and ran, and shewed her husband, and said unto him, Behold, the man hath appeared unto me, that came unto me the other day.

11. And Manoah arose, and went after his wife, and came to the man, and said unto him, Art thou the man that spakest unto the woman? And he said, I am.

12. And Manoah said, Now let thy words come to pass. How shall we order the child [what shall be the order of the child and his work?] and how shall we do unto him? [Not a step would they take without divine direction.]

13. And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Of all that I said unto the woman let her beware.

14. She may not eat of any thing that cometh of the vine [see Numb. vi. 3-5], neither let her drink wine or strong drink, nor eat any unclean thing: all that I commanded her let her observe. [The wine is described as the

vine of wine—the grape-bearing vine; thus distinguishing it from the wild cucumber vine; see 2 Kings iv. 39].

15. And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, I pray thee, let us detain thee, until we shall have made ready a kid for thee [literally, before thy face. Compare with this the narrative of Gideon. A kid was a special delicacy; see Gen. xxvii. 9; 1 Sam. xvi. 20].

16. And the angel of the Lord said unto Manoah, Though thou detain me, I will not eat of thy bread: and if thou wilt offer a burnt offering, thou must offer it unto the Lord [literally, a burnt offering unto the Lord thou mayest offer it. Compare chap. vi. 20. The worship of angels is nowhere encouraged by angels themselves; they invariably point worshippers to God himself. The angel did not understand Manoah as preparing a simple meal, but as really making preparations for sacrifice. Cautions given by angels should be studied with care—Rev. xix. 10, xxii. 8, 9; and see Acts x. 25, 26]. For Manoah knew not that he was an angel of the Lord.

17. And Manoah said unto the angel of the Lord, What is thy name [compare Gen. xxxii. 29; Exod. iii. 13; Prov. xxx. 4], that when thy sayings come to pass we may do thee honour [the word implying that some gift would be presented to the angel]?

18. And the angel of the Lord said unto him, Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret? [In Isa. ix. 5, this word is rendered “wonderful”: the word must be taken as an adjective. The only angel who names himself in scripture is Gabriel].

19. So Manoah took a kid with a meat offering, and offered it upon a rock unto the Lord: and the angel of the Lord did wondrously [as in some sense verifying his name]; and Manoah and his wife looked on [all they could do].

20. For it came to pass, when the flame went up toward heaven from off the altar [that which was a rock at first now became an altar], that the angel of the Lord ascended in the flame of the altar. And Manoah and his wife looked on it, and fell on their faces to the ground.

21. But the angel of the Lord did no more appear to Manoah and to his wife. Then Manoah knew that he was an angel of the Lord.

22. And Manoah said unto his wife, We shall surely die, because we have seen God [“as seeing him who is invisible”; Exod. xxxiii. 20; see also Gen. xxxii. 20 and Deut. v. 24].

23. But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these.

24. And the woman bare a son, and called his name Samson [to minister, a name denoting Nazaritic consecration]: and the child grew [see Luke i. 80, and ii. 40], and the Lord blessed him [“with a heroic spirit and extraordinary strength of body, far above that which the poets feign of their Hercules with his twelve incredible labours”].

25. And the Spirit of the Lord began to move him at times [literally, to agitate or thrust him—“to move him hither and thither, as the bells which hung in the skirts of Aaron’s garments; these bells have their name from a word which signifies that they were shaken to and fro”] in the camp of Dan between Zorah and Eshtaol.

Judges xiii. 23.

"But his wife said unto him, If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these."

MANOAH'S WIFE.

THIS is part of a family scene. It is quoted from a conversation which took place between husband and wife. Let us treat the incident as showing some aspects of family life, some methods of reading divine Providence, and some sources of consolation amid the distractions and mysteries of the present world.

Look at it as showing some aspects of family life. Here is the head of the house in gloom. Is he not always more or less in gloom, this same head of the house all the world over? Who ever knew a head of the house that was not more or less low-spirited, worried by a hundred anxieties, tormented by sudden fear? Perhaps naturally so: after all he *is* the head of the house; and probably the lightning conductor, being higher than any other part of the building, may have experience of thunderstorms and lightning discharges that lower parts of the structure know nothing about. As the head of the house you are in the market-place, you see things in their roughest aspects, you have to bear many a thing that you cannot explain to strangers, and there is an under-current in your consciousness which perhaps your truest friend has never seen, or seeing, appreciated; and therefore when we hear the head of the house complaining in tones that have no music in them, how know we but that the poor man has been undergoing vexations and distresses that he does not feel at liberty to explain? At any rate Manoah took this view of the angel's visit: "We have seen God: no man can see God and live—we shall surely die." Here we have a wife comforting her husband. Like a true woman, she let Manoah have his groan out. There is a beautiful cunning in love. It does not break in upon a sentence at a semicolon. It lets the groan get right out, and then it offers its gentle consolation. If we had heard Manoah alone, we should have said, A terrible thunder-storm has burst

upon this house, and God has come down upon it with awful vengeance; and not until we heard his wife's statement of the case should we have any clear idea of the reality of the circumstances. You complain of this word "*but*" when a statement is made to you and it proceeds fluently and satisfactorily; the speaker says *but*, and you say, "Aye, there it is again." We carelessly abuse this *but*; it sometimes, however, introduces all the light and all the music, and is found to be the key, long lost, of the gate which had impeded our progress. "But his wife said unto him"—"*but* a certain Samaritan came that way." Therefore remember that help sometimes comes after words that seem only to promise some greater distress. Be the complement of each other. The husband does not know all the case. Perhaps the wife would read it a little too hopefully. You must hear both the statements, put them both together, and draw your conclusions from the twofold statement. People are the complement of each other. Woe to that man who thinks he combines all populations and all personalities in himself. He must be a miserable man who thinks that he is the only man in the world. You would get more help from other people if you expected more, if you invited more, if you put yourself in circumstances that would justify the offering of more. There is not a poor creature in the world who cannot fill up the drop that is wanting to complete the fulness of some other creature's joy. You would not be half the man that you are except for your wife, and yet you never say "Thank you" with any degree of heartiness or sincerity. You listen to her suggestions with a half contempt, as if she did not know what she was talking about, and then you go and work out her idea and get the profit of it, and say what a clever man of business you are. That is not honest, it is not just—"Thou shalt not steal."

Here we have a husband and wife talking over a difficult case. Is not that a rare thing in these days of rush and tumult and noise, when a man never sees his little children, his very little ones, except in bed? He leaves home so early in the morning, and gets back so late at night, that he never sees his little ones but in slumber. Is it not now a rare thing for a husband and wife to sit down and talk a difficulty over in all its bearings?

Have we not known in our own experience many a wife wronged because of the husband failing to show proper confidence? The man has been in difficulties, wherever he has gone he has been pursued by a haunting dread, and he has suffered all this alone; whereas if he had but stated the case with all frankness and loving candour, who knows but that his wife might have said some word which might have been as a key to the lock, and as a solution of the hard and vexatious problem? You will always find it an inexpressible comfort to take your husband or wife, as the case may be, into your confidence, and talk any difficulty right through, keeping back no part of the case. "It soothes poor misery hearkening to her tale." If we lived in more domestic confidence, our houses would be homes, our homes would be churches, and those churches would be in the very vicinage of heaven.

Let us now look at the incident as showing some methods of reading divine Providence. There we have the timid and distrustful method. Manoah looks at the case, reads it, spells where he cannot read plainly, and then, looking up from his book, he says to his wife, "There is bad news for you: God is about to destroy us." There are these same timid and doubtful readers of Providence in society to-day. There are some men who never see the sky in its mid-day beauty, who never see summer in July at all, who really have never one day's true elevation of soul. I do not blame such people altogether. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. We cannot all read with equal facility, and see with equal distinctness. There are causes or sub-causes, intermediate, secondary influences arising from physical constitution and other circumstances over which we have no control, which trouble our vision even of God himself. Let us, therefore, put in a word wherever we can for those who are not constituted hopefully, who have not been gifted with a sanguine temperament. There are men amongst us whose life is a continual pain. It is possible so to read God's ways among men as to bring upon ourselves great distress. Is a man, therefore, to exclaim, "This is a punishment sent from heaven for some inscrutable reason, and I must endure it as well as I can; I shall never see the sky when not a cloud bedims its dome"? No, you are to struggle against this, you are to believe other people; that

is to say, you are to live in other people's lives, to get out of other people the piece that is wanting in your own life. You are not to put ashes upon your head and say, "There is nothing in the universe that I do not see." You are to call little children and to say, "What do you see?" and young men and say, "How does life look from your point of view?" and you are to live in other people. We are to walk by faith and not by sight; we are debtors both to the Jew and to the Greek; and we must get from one another a complete statement of the reality of God's way among the children of men. This is the inductive and hopeful method of reading divine Providence. Some cynical people who have no licence, and therefore ought to be arrested as metaphysical felons, say that women have no logic. And that sentence sounds as if really it ought to be true. It is so pat. It is one of those little weapons that a man can pick up and use as if he had always had it. I think that Manoah's wife was in very deed learned in what we call the inductive method of reasoning, for she stated her case with wonderful simplicity and clearness. "If the Lord were pleased to kill us, he would not have received a burnt offering and a meat offering at our hands; neither would he have shewed us all these things, nor would, as at this time, have told us such things as these." That is logic! That is the inductive method!—the method, namely, of putting things together and drawing a conclusion from the aggregate. Thank God if you have a wife who can talk like that. Why, if they had both been gloomy parties, what a house it would have been! They need never have taken the shutters down, and summer might have ignored their existence. But Manoah's wife was of a hopeful turn of mind. She had the eye which sees flecks of blue in the darkest skies. She had the ear which hears the softest goings of the Eternal. She was an interpreter of the divine thought. Oh, to have such an interpreter in every house, to have such an interpreter in every pulpit in England, to have such a companion on the highway of venture and enterprise! This is the eye that sees farther than the dull eye of criticism can ever see, that sees God's heart, that reads meanings that seem to be written afar. Have we this method of reading divine Providence? I call it the appreciative and thankful method. Why, some of us can take up our loaf and say, "Only this!" and say

it in a tone that means practical blasphemy ; others can take up a crust and say, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow ! This is God's gift. He cannot mean me to die, or he would not have put this into my hand." A litany in one sentence, worthy to find its place amid the hallelujahs and blessings of the better world. Who was it that said, "When I look at those who are higher than I am, I am tempted towards discontent, but when I go out amongst the poor and compare their condition with my own, my heart overflows with loving thankfulness" ? How dare we complain, the worst, the poorest among us ! Taking the average—and a low average—what man, what woman is there that ought not to join in heartfelt praise to Almighty God for mercies innumerable as the moments, delicate as the light, present as the living air round about one's poor life ! Manoah droops, pines, dies ; his wife goes out, gathers the flowers in the Lord's garden, brings them back to him and says, "Manoah, be a man : would God have given us these things if he meant to kill us ?" And poor Manoah lifts up his drooping face to the light. Put together your mercies, look at them as a whole and say, Can this mean death, or does it mean life ? and I know what the glad answer will be.

There are some sources of consolation amid the distractions and mysteries of the present world. Every life has some blessings. I charge it upon you when the year closes to reckon up your blessings. Men eagerly count up their misfortunes and trials, but how few remember their mercies ! One man says, I have no wealth. No, but look what a pair of shoulders you have ! Another man says, I have but feeble health. True, but look what investments you have ! Another voice says, I am disposed to be fearful and dispirited. But look what a wife you have ! Every life has some blessing, and we must find what that blessing or those blessings are. We must put them together, and reason from the goodness towards the glory of God. Amid these blessings religious privileges are sure signs of the divine favour. We have religious privileges : we can go into the sanctuary : we can take counsel together ; we can kneel side by side in prayer ; we can go to the very best sources for religious instruction and religious comfort. Does God mean to kill when he

has given us such proofs of favour as these? Does he mean to kill us when he has sent the minister of the covenant to tell us glad tidings of great joy? Let us find in religious blessings proof that God means no evil to us. We will persist in looking at a distress till it seems to be the only thing in our life. We need to put two and two together. Do not be losing yourselves in the midst of details that have apparently no connection. Gather up your life until it becomes shaped into meaning, and then when you have seen things in their proper relationships pronounce calmly upon the ways of God towards you. Let us put away religious melancholy. Many people are saying, "I fear I have committed the unpardonable sin; I seem to have offended God for ever, and put him far away from me, so that I can never see his face again." Wouldst thou have any anxiety about the thing if he were clean gone for ever, and had drawn the skirts of his garments after him so as to leave thee but the blackness of darkness? By the very fact of thy concern, understand that God has not purposed to kill thee. Cry mightily for him; say, "Oh that I knew where I might find him!" "Why standest thou afar off, O God?" And if thou criest so, he will surely come again, saying, "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."

Let us learn from this family scene that great joys often succeed great fears. Manoah said, The Lord intends to kill us; his wife said, Not so, or he would not have received a burnt offering at our hands. And behold Samson was born, a judge of Israel, an avenger of mighty wrongs. Is it ever so dark as just before the dawn? Are you not witnesses that a great darkness always precedes a great light—that some peculiar misery comes to prepare the way for some unusual joy? If we could only lay hold of life in this way, and read it, not with unreasonable expectation of deliverance and joy, but with hopefulness, we should never become old, desiccated, or tuneless—to the last we should wear like old silver, to the very last there would be in us a light above the brightness of the sun. Let us read the goodness of God in others. Many a time we have been recovered from practical atheism by reading other people's experience. When things seem to have been going wrong with us, we have looked

over into a neighbour's garden and seen his flowers, and our hearts have been cheered by the vision.

Oh, woman, talk of your mission! Here is your mission described and exemplified in the case of the wife of Manoah. What do you want with your School Board and platform experiences, and those mysterious abstractions which you call your *rights*? Here is your field of operation. Cheer those who are dispirited; read the word of God in its spirit to those who can only read its cold meagre letter, and the strongest of us will bless you for your gentle ministry. Did not Paul write to the Church at Rome saying, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila," putting the wife's name first, and that in no mere spirit of courtesy, but probably in recognition of her supreme influence in spiritual direction and consolation? Who was it in the days of Scottish persecution? Was it not Helen Stirk—a braver Helen than the fiend Macgregor—who said to her husband as they were both carried forth to be executed, "Husband, rejoice, for we have lived together many joyful days; but this day wherein we die together ought to be most joyful to us both, because we must have joy for ever; therefore I will not bid you good-night, for we shall suddenly meet within the kingdom of heaven"? Who was it when Whitefield was mobbed and threatened, and when even he was about to give way,—who was it but his wife who took hold of his robe and said, "George, play the man for your God"? Oh, woman, talk of your rights, and your sphere, and your having nothing to do! We should die without you. The man is fit for murders, stratagems, and spoils who is not a worshipper of woman—a worshipper of his mother, of his sister, of his wife, of the ideal woman. Have a sphere of labour at home, go into sick-chambers and speak as only a woman can speak. Counsel your sons as if you were not dictating to them. Read Providence to your husband in an incidental manner, as if you were not reproaching him for his dulness, but simply hinting that you had seen unexpected light. Women have always said the finest things that have ever been said in the Bible. She was a woman that—we speak it with reverence—outwitted the Lord himself. He said "No" to her request. And he was not accustomed to say that word; it fell awkwardly from those dear lips. "I am not sent but

unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs." But the woman outwitted him. Scribes and Pharisees would have been silenced, but the woman said: "Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." Christ yielded himself a willing prisoner of love. Trust the heart of love to outstrip the brain of genius!

SELECTED NOTE.

Samson was the son of Manoah, of the tribe of Dan, and born A.M. 2848, of a mother whose name is nowhere given in the Scriptures. His destination to great achievements began to evince itself at a very early age by the illapses of superhuman strength which came from time to time upon him. Falling in love with a woman of Sorek, named Delilah, he became so infatuated by his passion, that nothing but his bodily strength could equal his mental weakness. Betrayed by her, and forsaken of Heaven, the Philistines having deprived him of sight, at first immured him in a prison, and made him grind at the mill like a slave. As this was an employment which in the East usually devolves on women, to assign it to such a man as Samson was virtually to reduce him to the lowest state of degradation and shame. In process of time, while remaining in this confinement, his hair recovered its growth, and with it such a profound repentance seems to have wrought in his heart as virtually reinvested him with the character and the powers he had so culpably lost. Of this fact his enemies were not aware. They kept him like a wild beast for mockery and insult. On the occasion of a feast in honour of their god Dagon, Samson was ordered to be brought out to be made a laughing-stock to his enemies. He secretly determined to use his recovered strength to tremendous effect, and persuaded a boy to conduct him to the two pillars upon which the roof of the building rested. Here, after pausing for a short time, while he prefers a brief prayer to Heaven, he grasps the massy pillars, and bowing with resistless force, the whole building rocks and totters, and the roof, encumbered with the weight of the spectators, rushes down, and the whole assembly, including Samson himself, are crushed to pieces in the ruin. Thus terminated the career of one of the most remarkable personages of all history, whether sacred or profane. The enrolment of his name by an apostolic pen (Heb. xi. 32) in the list of the ancient worthies "who had by faith obtained an excellent repute" warrants us undoubtedly in a favourable estimate of his character on the whole, while at the same time the fertility of the inspired narrative has perpetuated the record of infirmities which must for ever mar the lustre of his noble deeds.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing. Thou knowest when to open thine hand and when to close it, and it is ours but to watch the opening and the shutting. Thou art King: we are the subjects of thy crown. The Lord reigneth. That is the highest note in our song, the gladdest tone of our rhapsody. We abide under the shadow of the Almighty, and take nothing into our own hands, for they are not only unclean, but weak because unclean. We come to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Unknown One, and the for-ever Unknowable, yet still always coming to our heart's best feeling, a new light, a new warmth, a new gladness. We know thee by our love. Our hearts grope for thee, assured that thou art hidden in the darkness, and concealed in the light, and everywhere present to bless and heal and redeem. Now we know thee in Christ Jesus—the heart of God, the will of God, the whole meaning of eternity in relation to man. This is wonderful in our eyes. Sometimes we touch him, so near we are, and so reverently familiar; yet we feel that it is like touching a cloud hiding mysteries; and sometimes we stand afar off, because we do not know his language, we cannot follow his words: we know them as terms, but we cannot see all the meaning with which he charges them. Nevertheless, he is with us to-day, to-morrow, and on the third day; then he rises again, and we see him no more after the flesh: but we know that he lives; he left his promise with us: we claim it, we rejoice in it, our heaven begins in its music, and our eternity of bliss is assured by a living faith in the living Christ. Thou hast done all things well. Sometimes we have thought otherwise, and at those times of ignorance thou hast graciously turned away thine eyes from us, that thou mightest not see our folly; but we have come to repent; we have seen the larger work, the fuller meaning, somewhat of the ultimate intention—then our mouth has been filled with singing, and our heart with joy, and our eyes with tears of gladness. Henceforth we will trouble thee no more. Be the rain heavy and the storm bitter, or the sky burning with gracious summer, it shall not be ours to murmur at the reigning, living, loving Father. Thou doest all things as thou wilt; the time is kept in the upper sanctuary, and the law is with the Lord and not with man. This is the gift of Christ—this glowing, triumphant faith; this is the miracle of the cross; this is the meaning of the resurrection as to our own spiritual victory. Now we glory in tribulations also. They were the last to come into the song; they stood back, far off, frowning and hesitant, unwilling to be made use of for Christian sacrifice; but now by faith we have brought them in one by one: and we glory in tribulations also—yea, we are exceedingly

filled with gladness, and we forget our sorrow as the sea might forget in its fulness the stone which lies in its depths. We bless thee for all these high emotions, these noble impulses, these upward outgoings of the soul: they do us good; they cleanse the heart; they give elevation to the whole scale of life—they are the very miracles of heaven. We put our whole being into thine hand, saying, Do as thou wilt: thy will, not mine, be done; what thou choosest is best, what thou doest is right. This we have learned in Jesus Christ; this is the lesson we have received in our crucifixion with the Son of God. Thou dost administer thy discipline to us in various ways. Sometimes thou dost bring us down from great heights; sometimes thou dost chasten us with heavy sorrows, so that men pity us, so that human creatures who are strangers cannot look on without sympathetic tears. Yet the sufferer is the most rejoicing, because where pain abounds grace doth much more abound; where the background is blackest every touch of thy light shines with a new and dazzling meaning. Thou hast brought us together again after separation—some for one week, some for a few days, some for a longer period. For all renewal of fellowship, and trust, and love, we bless thee. We need all these intermediate helps, that we may be continued in our faith and patience in reference to the eternal communion. Some are in great sorrow; some cannot see for tears; many have no helpers, and a few have none to speak to: a few words of uttered misery would be a help in the wilderness, but there is nothing present but the great glaring light or the heedless wind. Say to such that thou art near, and that everything may be told to thee, even things that may not be told to sweetest mother, or most trusting and loving friend. Help us during the few days that remain. How they fly! Presently they will all be gone, and we, who were going to enjoy ourselves some day, will find that our proposals are lost in the wind, and that the opportunity is gone. Help us, then, to begin now, to enter into the joy of the Lord now, to know that now is the accepted time and now the day of salvation. Amen.

Judges xiv.

1. And Samson went down to Timnath [a portion], and saw a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines [such intercourse was forbidden, Exod. xxxiv. 16; Deut. vii. 3, 4].

2. And he came up, and told his father and his mother, and said, I have seen a woman in Timnath of the daughters of the Philistines: now therefore get her for me to wife.

3. Then his father and his mother said unto him, Is there never a woman among the daughters of thy brethren, or among all my people, that thou goest to take a wife of the uncircumcised Philistines? [a term of the intensest hatred]. And Samson said unto his father, Get her for me; for she pleaseth me well [she is right in my eyes].

4. But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord [that there was more in it than at first sight appeared], that he sought an occasion [a quarrel] against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.

5. Then went Samson down, and his father and his mother, to Timnath, and came to the vineyards of Timnath : and behold, a young lion [a lion of lions] roared against him.

6. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him [pervaded him], and he rent [throttled] him as he would have rent a kid, and he had nothing in his hand : but he told not his father or his mother what he had done [absence of vanity].

7. And he went down, and talked with the woman [the requisite betrothal arrangements having been made], and she pleased Samson well.

8. And after a time [an absolutely indefinite period] he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion : and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase [rather, skeleton. The burning sun of the East soon dried the body] of the lion.

9. And he took thereof in his hands [a skeleton not being treated as a dead body], and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat : but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion [he had not told of the slaying of the lion].

10. So his father went down unto the woman : and Samson made there a feast ; for so used the young men to do [in all ages, Gen. xxix. 22 ; Rev. xix. 9].

11. And it came to pass, when they saw him [perhaps saw him in some new aspect], that they brought thirty companions [paranymphs, children of the bridechamber], to be with him.

12. And Samson said unto them, I will now put forth a riddle [from a word which means "to knot"] unto you : if ye can certainly declare it me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty sheets [shirts] and thirty change of garments :

13. But if ye cannot declare it me, then shall ye give me thirty sheets and thirty change of garments. And they said unto him, Put forth thy riddle, that we may hear it.*

14. And he said unto them, Out of the eater came forth meat, and out of the strong came forth sweetness. And they could not in three days expound the riddle.

15. And it came to pass on the seventh day [being in despair], that they said unto Samson's wife, Entice thy husband, that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father's house with fire : have ye called us to take that we have [to spoil us] ? is it not so ?

* "Cassel quotes a curious parallel from the annals of North Germany. The judges offer a woman her husband's life if she can make a riddle which they cannot guess. On her way to the court she had found the carcase of a horse, in which a bird had built its nest and hatched six young ones, which she took away. Her riddle was (I venture rudely to translate the rude old lines) :—

'As hitherwards on my way I sped,
I took the living out of the dead,
Six were thus of the seventh made quit :—
To rede my riddle, my lords, 'tis fit.'

The judges failed, and the husband was spared."—*Archdeacon Farrar*.

16. And Samson's wife wept before him [marriage wine made sour] and said, Thou dost but hate me and lovest me not : thou hast put forth a riddle unto the children of my people, and hast not told it me. And he said unto her, Behold, I have not told it my father nor my mother, and shall I tell it thee ?

17. And she wept before him the seven days, while their feast lasted : and it came to pass on the seventh day, that he told her, because she lay sore upon him : and she told the riddle to the children of her people.

18. And the men of the city said unto him on the seventh day before the sun went down, What is sweeter than honey ? and what is stronger than a lion ? And he said unto them, If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not found out my riddle.

19. And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil [armour or suits of armour], and gave change of garments unto them which expounded the riddle [paid them out of their own purse]. And his anger was kindled, and he went up to his father's house.

20. But Samson's wife was given to his companion [the chief of the paranymps : the bride-conductor], whom he had used as his friend [to the companion whose friend she was].

SAMSON.

THE whole story of Samson is romantic, yet many of its lessons are most practical and useful. No such prodigy is known in our days, and indeed, such a man would, in many respects, be out of keeping with our civilisation. We have no room for him ; we have no need of him. There are some respects in which history could not repeat itself with advantage in our civilisation. But the temptation is that we should look upon our progress as the measure of human history. We want a wider outlook. We must take in more field, if we would see things in their right perspective and proportion. We certainly did need this very type of man to complete the divine conception of humanity. If Samson had been left out, we might have said, there is one type which God never allowed to come upon the stage of human history. We have had the sanguinary man, Cain ; the believing man, Abraham ; the cunning man, Jacob ; the meek and much-enduring man, yet a man full of enterprise and soldiery daring, Moses ; we have had wise men and valiant men, not a few, but a man entrusted with all-abounding strength—the man of iron muscle—the elephantine man, we have never

had in perfection. God leaves out nothing. God will finish the picture if we will not interrupt him with our provoking impatience. We needed just this man—huge, overwhelming, mountainous, and in very deed terrible; we needed to see what sheer strength could do, mere bone and muscle and bulk—what part they could play in the shifting and urgent drama of human history. We have never met the like of this man before. He does not know himself. There is so much of him that he cannot really take in the whole prospect and meaning. A kind of Adam over again: so new a thing, and such a baby. What will he do? How will he compare with his forerunners?

Physical power is the most rudimentary and imperfect form of strength. Yet it has its uses. It is full of high suggestion, if spiritually interpreted. There is a sense in which God glories in the very make of a man. Sometimes he becomes quite an angel. "Thou hast made him a little lower than God." God can have no delight in mere weakness for its own sake. He will not make the halt, the cripple, the deformed, the insane, merely as such; he will make use of them in his great economy, and he will sometimes turn disadvantages into advantages. But almightiness can take no pleasure in mere weakness, simply as such. But what is the strongest man known to us? Is there a tiger in the forest or jungle that could not tear him to pieces? What is *mere* strength—sheer physical energy? A man boasts that he has climbed some astounding height; and, behold, when he looked up, the wild goat was fifty feet higher, looking down upon him with a kind of superb and unconscious contempt! The fleetest man is outstripped by the tiniest bird that ever fluttered a wing. Who, therefore, would worship *mere* strength? Yet without health what is the world to any man? and strength is nothing if it be not expressive of health. Health is a compound term. It means equality, harmony, the fine, happy working of all faculties, so much so that we do not know they are working at all. Who knows that the earth is moving? and why is there no knowledge of the motion? Because the motion is so great, so regular. So it is with health. Whilst, therefore, we pour contempt upon mere strength, taking it singly and alone, we cannot but rejoice in that balance of faculty and motion expressing

itself in the sweet, clean word, health—a state of being in which every happy influence is felt, responded to, acknowledged as a religious visitation, and turned to religious uses. The reason we dwell upon this matter of strength is that under some form or other, outward and measurable, it exercises a disastrous influence upon the imagination of many men: they judge by bulk, vastness, strength, all of which are as nothing compared with the infinite and the eternal, yet every one of them may be made of use in helping the mind to a larger and truer realisation of that which is infinite and everlasting.

Pitiable is a strong body and a weak spiritual nature. Samson was all force, his strength he played with. How infantile was his mind! It is beautiful to watch this huge elephant-man as he moves clumsily about. He is so pleased with little things. He delights in the very things that are weak. He feels that he is a stupendous contrast to everything that is within reach of his vision. How he was delighted with a riddle! how he shook with internal laughter as he thought he would propound a riddle to his wife and her friends! and when the idea of giving prizes for answers to riddles occurred to him, he was as pleased as a modern journalist. He said to the people about him: I have a riddle, and if you can give me the answer I will give you clothing, and almost anything you like to ask for; and he turned aside to hide the smile of triumph with which he regarded the imbecility of his contemporaries in the matter of answering riddles. Then what fancies he took! dreaming new dreams, and pleased with them as a child blowing blue bubbles from a clay pipe. Oh, how charmed he was with all things little, weak, fanciful! How we do eke out ourselves by taking in all that is contrastive and dissimilar! The man of slow, hesitating speech, whose words all counted do not number more than three hundred, is amazed at the volubility of a man who can speak a long time without stopping. He delights in that man; calls him a phenomenon; regards him as a prodigy. That is exactly what Samson did in relation to the little things and the little people who were round about him: he liked to have them there; they seemed to make up something that was wanting in his own vastness. Now, the other contrast is possible to every one of us.

We may have a great spiritual nature, however weak and deformed may be our physical condition. The spirit can be born again. The interior man can be turned, like one of old, "into another man," so that his friends shall not know him, but shall wonder at his chastened, sweet, loving disposition, and speak of him as men might speak of a heavenly miracle. Wonderful is the providence of God in this direction ! We cannot all be great, but we can all be good. All men may not have an abundance of this world's wealth, but every man may be rich in faith, and otherwise rich towards God and society. Who may not store his mind with thoughts of the great and bright minds of the days that have gone ? With what poetry he may enrich his imagination ! With what gems of thinking he may stud his memory ! The door of the temple of Knowledge stands wide open, and the poorest man may go in and find himself at home under that lofty and hospitable roof. The body a man may not be able to carry up to Samson's strength, but the mind every man can cultivate with diligent industry, and patience, and faith, until he find in his own intelligence bread to eat that the world knoweth not of, a comfortable sustenance which hands can never steal. Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, so that whatever may be the outward man—poor, dishonoured, mean—the inward man may be full of intelligence, and goodness, and truth. There was One of whom it was said, "There is no beauty that we should desire him ;" and of that same One it was said, through his miracles, his graciousness of speech, his wisdom, his love, his Cross, his blood, he should become "the desire of all nations." The time will come when the nations will not look on bulk, strength, guns, swords, standing armies, and glittering diadems ; but upon libraries, good actions, noble beneficences, and in that day all outward strength and pomp shall be considered vanity ; for the soul alone shall be valiant for its attainments in the highest lore.

Samson's strength was quite unregulated. There was no soldierly discipline about the elephant. When he rose he seemed to wonder that he ever sat down ; when he sat down he was larger every way than any other man he had ever seen. Who can be trusted with great strength that is ill-regulated ? Hardly

a man, and not a nation. Only give a nation guns enough, and that nation must quarrel, must fight. Samson, looking round and remembering his huge strength, thought he would tie the tails of about three hundred foxes all together—just by way of showing what he could do—and light them as a weak man might strike a match, and send them into the growing fields (xv. 4, 5). It was an unregulated strength. Only the one man could do that deed, and where that power is not balanced by another which checks it, chastens it, subdues it, nothing can happen but wantonness, destruction, ruin. Then Samson would praise himself; he said, "I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself"—(xvi. 20)—all that I want to put on my very best power is to shake myself, as a lion might shake the dew from his mane and hold his great jaw aloft proudly in the air. That is the tendency of all great endowment if it be not held back by spiritual ministry. That is the tendency of all strength unless it has learned the lesson that in the sight of God's almightiness there is no strength. We must be conquered by omnipotence. There is a great danger in one-sided strength. The great aim of life should be to cultivate an all-round—that is, a happily-balanced and harmonious—strength; otherwise we shall have eccentricity, erratic experiment, tremendous dash, and pitiable failure. This lesson should be applied to spiritual education. There is a danger of being too strong in this direction, or that, at the expense of equal culture along other lines. What is the consequence? Bigotry, stubbornness that is stupid, and self-opinionatedness—that is, self-idolatry. No one man knows everything; no one church is *the* Church. When all Churches are brought together, with their strength, weakness, and every possible variety of thought, attainment, and purpose, you begin to see the Church, complete as the rainbow which is round about the Throne. Until that time come, we are parts of the Church—little parts, awaiting the upcoming of our stronger brethren and our weaker brethren, that we may be all one in Christ. The danger is, too, that men boast of ill-regulated strength. They say, in dubious terms, Whatever I may be in this or that direction, I am, at all events, strong at this point. That may be an impious boast. The boasting, if any, should take effect in a different direction—namely: being comparatively strong at this point,

thank God, I must go on to be equally strong through the whole series. Then the triumph divinely ascribed may be the beginning of a complete and lustrous manhood.

We cannot read the life of Samson without being struck with the perishableness of all outward strength. "Tell me, I pray thee, wherein thy great strength lieth?" Herein Samson plays the gigantic baby. He tantalises the people, and then smiles at them. But he is lured, and persuaded, and conquered. He has won in two or three instances. When they bound him with green withs that were never dried—which he himself proposed as an experiment—"he brake the withs, as a thread of tow is broken when it toucheth the fire" (xvi. 9). Then he smiled at the lords of the Philistines. Then another experiment he would try:—"If they bind me fast with new ropes that never were occupied, then shall I be weak, and be as another man. Delilah therefore took new ropes, and bound him therewith, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And there were liers in wait abiding in the chamber. And he brake them from off his arms like a thread" (xvi. 11, 12). Then he told about his hair:—"If thou weavest the seven locks of my head with the web. And she fastened it with the pin, and said unto him, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awaked out of his sleep, and went away with the pin of the beam, and with the web" (xvi. 13, 14). And then he told her about the vow. He came to the religious mystery—the mystery that holds everything in a great cloud. "He told her all his heart, and said unto her, There hath not come a razor upon mine head; for I have been a Nazarite unto God from my mother's womb: if I be shaven, then my strength will go from me, and I shall become weak, and be like any other man" (xvi. 17). And it was so. "He awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself" (xvi. 20). He went out, and he shook himself; but having lost his religion, he had lost his power. When a man loses his character, all the life-house that he has been building falls, and great is the fall thereof! He may conduct a few experiments, and thereby may mock the malice of many who have watched him with envy and despair: so long as his character remains he is a mighty man; but when he breaks his vow, the other

breaking is a matter which an infant can accomplish. When a man tears down the altar, his house follows in the tremendous collapse.

How much strength there is that is only outward! We say of Samson that his strength lay in his hair, and therein we do not represent the whole truth: but is there not much strength that is only external—beauty, which is said to be but skin-deep at the best; money, which may take to itself wings and flee away; great bodily strength, which time can suck out of a man, so insidiously and imperceptibly, that he will not know until he is a tottering pilgrim within a step of the tomb? But the point which is often overlooked in connection with Samson is, that his strength was not in the hair, but in that which the hair represented—namely, constancy to a vow, faithfulness to a period of consecration. The hair was nothing: there was no strength in that; but it was symbolical of a grand religious process which had been accomplished in Samson, and, having been faithful to God, God was faithful to him. “Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.” Let a man take care how he treats his vows. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools.” Who has not entered into a vow? Who has not in some time of loneliness said, If God deliver me, I will be his slave in love and service evermore? Who has not said, If the Lord deliver me out of affliction, my life shall be a daily consecration? Who has not said, when men pressed heavily against him, and the best friend of all human friends deserted him, If God will give me another chance in life to make an honest livelihood, I will give him a tenth of all that I possess? Every man must remember his own vows, bring them into full view, apply to them searching and godly criticism, and know exactly what position he occupies. When we talk about times that are depressed, business that is paralysed, circumstances that are but so many impediments and obstructions in the way of progress, we are talking about effects and not about causes. Until we find the fount and origin of the evils which we mourn, the evils will but multiply under our lamentation. If we heal our hurt slightly; if we daub the wall with untempered mortar; If we cry “Peace,

peace," where there is no peace, God will not deliver us out of the consequences of our mad infatuation.

Where, then, shall strength be found—the true, abiding, generous, beneficent strength? One man answers the question: he says, "Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day." The same man says, "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Another man, writing to a dear friend, says, "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth,"—not that the soul may be as the body, but that the body may be as healthy as the soul. But in these expressions we lack definiteness. The expressions themselves are grand, no doubt copious in meaning, certainly very musical in utterance, but there is something wanting to centralise and define them. Then let the same man who spake the first two sentences speak again:—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." That is what we wanted—the Name, the living Name, the redeeming Name. There will be periods when our strength goes down. Christ himself was weak in Gethsemane. There appeared an angel unto him, "strengthening him," fortifying him, holding him up, lest he dash his foot against a stone. Do not be afraid, then, if times of weakness beset our own Christian life—times when the devil seems to play with us, and have it all his own way with us—when he mocks us, taunts us, runs around us in laughter filled with contempt, and challenges us to repel or subdue him; such are times of darkness, times of weakness, times of fear—the very power and agony of hell. In that hour, oh that Paul would speak to us! His word would be as a resurrection voice. Let us remember this word in our wilderness temptations and Gethsemane agonies—"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." "Mighty Saviour, dwell with me!"

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we know thee by thy sweet name of Love. Surely it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But we know thee in Christ Jesus, forbearing, patient, continually seeking us that we may be saved and made like unto thyself. We remember thy word concerning the terrible things in righteousness which thou didst to those who lived long ago. Surely then thou didst shake the heavens and the earth, and thine anger burned like a fire; it was then a fearful thing to behold thy face, for thy jealousy and thine anger burned there against the sins of men. But now thou art coming to us day by day by the way of the cross. Thou dost on beholding the city weep over it; thou dost send gospels of grace to those even who are furthest away; thou dost keep the door open that the prodigal may re-enter and establish himself in his Father's house. Thou art a gracious God, a loving Father. Behold, thine hand is stretched out towards us, not in wrath, but in welcome, and we would answer thy appeal as thou mayest inspire our hearts. We bless thee for the great words thou hast taught us, for they lift up all other speech, and sanctify all other intercourse. We find them nowhere but in thy Book, and finding them there we run unto them as unto a strong tower; they are part of thy very self; therein we read of thee as the eternal, the everlasting, the gracious Lord, the pardoning and forgiving God, the Lord of mercy and of might, the God of love. We feel that we in very deed are now on strong ground, building our life upon a rock, and that all we are and do is under thy control. So now we leave all that is below and mean and unworthy of us, and we ascend unto the hill of the Lord, standing upon the high and lofty places, overhearing the music of heaven, and catching early intimation of thy will. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes. Help us to live in the spirit of these gracious truths, that we ourselves may be gracious, having large-hearted feeling towards all the children of men, and even those who have strayed the most and are the most obdurate. Fill us with the spirit of redeeming pity. May we long to save the souls of men; may this be our burning concern, our daily zeal, growing in intensity and compelling us to many an act of sacrifice. Again and again we plead for one another—that necessity may be relieved, that the pressure of heavy burdens may be mitigated, that those who are weary and ill at ease may be lifted by thy gracious hands, and enabled to prosecute their journey with renewed strength and hope. We pray for all who have great plans before them, daring schemes, new enterprises, which touch the imagination, and sometimes stun the ear, though, alas! sometimes ignoring the conscience. The Lord look upon such: give them wisdom in the day of sudden temptation; enable them to consult the heavens before committing themselves to the exactions of earth. The Lord

be with all those who cannot be in the open sanctuary; make a little chamber for them at home, a secret altar, a place of wordless communion, where tears will be speech and sighs will be eloquence; the Lord grant this favour: then shall all thy people rejoice with a great gladness, and there shall be Sabbath day all the world round. Amen.

Judges xiv.-xvi.

SAMSON.—LIGHT AND SHADOW.

IT would be unjust to consider this as a finished picture of the man of strength. In all that we have said we have endeavoured to establish by good reasoning and clear reference. But it would be unjust to pronounce upon any life after merely looking at a few incidental points in its course. That is a danger to which all criticism is exposed. We are prone to look upon vivid incidents, and to omit all the great breadths and spaces of the daily life, and to found our judgment of one another upon peculiarities, eccentricities, and very vivid displays of strength, or very pitiful exhibitions of weakness. This is wrong; this is unjust. Samson has indeed done many things that have startled us. We have been inclined to say now and again in the course of our study, This is the man—the whole man; in this point, or in that, we have the key of his character. Now the reality is that Samson is a greater man than the mere outline of the romantic part of his history would suggest. There was another man than that which we have just seen pass before us—the great giant, the man who played with things that were burdens to other men, the man who was infantile in mental weakness on many occasions; there is another man within that outer man, and until we understand somewhat of that interior personality we cannot grasp the whole character of Samson. We must judge men by the *mass* of their character. Who would not resent the idea of being tested by the incidents of a few months, rather than being judged by the level and the general tone and the average of a lifetime? Man does not reveal himself in little points, except incidentally and illustratively: hence we must live with the man, and so far as history will allow us to do so we must become identified with him: when we get to understand his

motives we shall begin to comprehend his conduct, and when we put together the night and the day, the summer and the winter, the fair youth and the white old age, then we may be in some degree prepared to say what the man in reality was. When this rule of judgment obtains we shall get rid of all pettishness of criticism, all vain remark upon one another : before pronouncing the final judgment, and especially a harsh verdict, we shall say : We do not know enough about him ; we have only seen a few points in the man ; he seems to be a greater and fuller man than he disclosed himself to be on the occasions when we saw him ; had we seen more of him, and known more of him, we should have come probably to a more generous conclusion. That is the rule of Christian charity, and whoso violates it is no friend of Christ. He may show a certain kind of critical ability, and the very malice of hell in the power of sneering, but he knows nothing about the agony and the love of the Cross.

Is the life of Samson, then, comprehended within these few incidents which have just passed before us ? The incidents upon which we have remarked might all have occurred within a few months. What was the exact position of Samson in Israel ? He judged Israel twenty years. How often is that fact overlooked ! we speak of the great strong man, the elephantine child, the huge monstrosity, but who thinks of twenty years' service—the consideration of all the necessities of the people, the frown which made the enemy afraid, the smile which encouraged struggling virtue, the recognition which came very near to being an inspiration ? Who knows what headache and heart-ache the man had in prosecuting and completing the judgeship ? Who can be twenty full years at any one service without amassing in that time features, actions, exhibitions of strength and weakness, sagacity, folly,—all of which ought to be taken into account before pronouncing final judgment ? Thus may it be with us, or it will go hard with us in the day of partial and prejudiced criticism. Who will condemn you for one little month in your life ? Then you were in very deed a fool ; you know it ; you own it : you broke through the sacred law ; you did things you dare not name ; you reeled and stumbled and fell, but were up again in a moment. Shall he be judge of your life

who saw the reeling and the falling? or shall he be judge who knows that for ten years, twenty, or more, you walked right steadily, a brave soul, charged with generous thoughts, and often doing good with both hands? So it must be with all men. But we are prone to break that rule. How small we are, and unjust, herein; we will turn off a friend who has served us twenty years because of one petulant word which he spoke! Who has the justice, not to say generosity, to take in a whole lifetime, and let little incidents or great incidents fall into their proper perspective? Until we do this we cannot ply the craft of criticism: we are ill judges, and we shall do one another grievous injury.

Some physical constitutions are to be pitied. Samson's was particularly such a constitution. He seemed to be all body. He appeared to have run altogether into bone and muscle. He was obviously only a giant. How seldom we see more than one aspect of a man! call up any great name in Biblical history, and you will find how often one little, or great, characteristic is supposed to sum up and express the man. We call up the name of Moses, and think of nothing but his meekness: whereas, there was no man in all the ancient gallery of portraits that could burn with a fiercer anger; he brake stones upon stones, and shattered the very tablets written by the finger of God. We say, Characterise Jeremiah, and instantly we think of his tears, and call him the weeping prophet: whereas who concealed an eloquence equal to his?—a marvellous, many-coloured eloquence, now so strong, and now so pathetic: now all lightning, and now all tears. We must beware of the sophism that a life can be summed up in one little characteristic. Herein God will be Judge. Some men cannot be radiant. They may think they are, but they are only making sport for the Philistines when they are trying the trick of cheerfulness which they cannot learn. Other men cannot be wise. If they have conceived some plan of so-called wisdom, and submit it to you, and take it back again, they set it upside down, and forget exactly where it began and where it ended. They are to be pitied. Weakness is written right across the main line of the face; weakness characterises every tone of the voice. They are not to be judged harshly. Blessed be God,

the judgment is with himself, and what if the first be last, and the last be first?

Is there hope of renewal for overthrown men? One would hope so:—"Howbeit the hair of his head began to grow again after he was shaven"—(xvi. 22). Is this real renewal or only apparent? It was not the hair that was in fault, but the soul. We have seen that the strength lay not in the hair, but in the vow which that hair represented and confirmed. If the matter had been one purely of person adornment, the hair might have grown again on the strong and noble head, and covered it as luxuriantly as before; but it was the soul that was shorn of its honour; it was the spirit that parted with its oath. How difficult to renew a broken character! Thank God, it is not impossible. It cannot be done mechanically,—that is to say from the outside, by skilful manipulation, by obedience to tabulated rules and orders,—“Ye must be born again:” it is not enough to renew the profession, to rehabilitate the reputation, to seem to be just as you were before,—“Ye must be born again.” Samson’s hair comes, the locks are as raven-like as ever, but has the soul been renewed; has the strong man cried mightily unto God for the restoration of his character? That is the vital point, and to trifle with it, pass over it hurriedly, is to lose the wisdom and the music of the occasion. Looking at men outwardly, we say, They seem to be as before; all the outer semblances are excellent, but who are we that we should judge what has taken place within? Outwardly the circumstances may be as before, but the man himself should take care as to what has happened within his soul. He should hold himself in severe and close monologue upon this matter, saying, These people form a good opinion of me; they think now I am a sober, upright, reliable man; I am regular in my church attendances, I keep up with the foremost in the public race, and the general impression seems to be that I have recovered myself,—but have I done so? I will not look at the outer man, but at the heart. Is that steadfast toward God—constant in holy love, burning with pure zeal for righteousness and truth? Man must not judge me in these matters—I must therefore judge myself the more austere and exhaustively. Blessed are we if we can apply such criticism to

ourselves; and blessed if outward appearances dimly typify a spiritual life, an unseen and undying probity of mind.

Samson died a curious death. He prayed in his blindness that he might yet show himself a strong man. The Philistines would have sport: Samson would that the occasion of sport might be turned into an occasion of what appeared to him to be just vengeance. Said he: Let me touch the pillars of the house; lay my poor hands on the pillars of this unholy place. And the giant's hands were lifted and put upon the pillars, and Samson cried mightily towards the heavens and shook the pillars, and the house fell, and he himself died with innumerable others. It was a poor way out of the world. But judge nothing by the death scene. In many instances the death scene amounts to nothing. Many a man has gone to heaven straight from the act of suicide. Many a man has died into heaven about whom we are prudently silent, because of some little or great incident which has disturbed our judgment of his character. It is not enough to leave the last transaction to be completed in a few moments of words without sacrifice, of profession without possible realisation. And some may have died and gone to heaven about whom we have our secret fears. Let us entertain no such apprehensions about any man whose twenty years of life lies open for public judgment. Nothing was said at the last; nay, more, the poor man got wrong within the last year of his life: he slipped, he fell, he was laid up a long time; what happened then between him and his Lord we cannot tell; but we have before us an instance or two of such secret and unreported interviews. The man who saw his Lord and plunged into the water, and came to him, had a talk with Christ all alone, and after that he became the most fervent of the apostles. The man is not to be judged by what he did in the last week of his life. It is the *life* that God will judge—the tone, the purpose, the main idea of the life. What is life indeed but a main idea—a grand central thought and aspiration? We shall delude ourselves and do injustice to others by thinking of collateral circumstances, things on the surface, things that come and go. Many a man has stolen who is no thief. Many a man has been overcome by strong drink who is no drunkard. Many a man has been guilty of innumerable

weaknesses who is a strong man in the soul and heart of him. That these generous constructions may be perverted is perfectly possible ; but I would rather that wicked men should pervert them than that the men who need such encouragement should go away in despair. We cannot tell what the dogs will do, but the children must nevertheless be fed. If any man should leave this study of Samson saying that licence has been given to do this or that which is wrong, he but aggravates his profanity by a final falsehood. On the other hand, many a man must be cheered, or he will be overwhelmed in despair, and we shall never hear of him any more. What is the central purpose of your life ? what is the main idea ? Answer that in the right way, and God will be merciful to you.

We have still to notice the most important point of all, which, in the mere matter of literal sequence, ought to have come earlier. Samson said he would go out and shake himself as at other times—"and he wist not that the Lord was departed from him" (xvi. 20). All the outer man was there, but it was a temple without a God. The giant was as grand to look at as ever, but his soul was as a banqueting-hall deserted. And Samson knew it not ! that is the painful point—the unknown losses of life, the unconscious losses of life : power gone, and the man not aware of it,—is there any irony so humbling, so awful to contemplate ? We may be walking skeletons : we may be men without manliness ; we may be houses untenanted : yet the eyes are where they always were, and just as bright, the voice is as vibrant as in olden time ; and yet the divinity is dead. And for a man not to know it ! We have had experience of this in other than merely religious directions. The writer that used to charm thinks he writes as well as ever, and only the readers are conscious that the genius is extinct : the right hand has forgotten its cunning ; the writer does not know it ; having filled his page, he says, That is as bright as ever : I never wrote with greater facility : in my old age I have become young again ;—he wist not that the spirit of genius had departed from him. So with the preacher. He supposes he preaches as energetically and as happily and usefully as ever ; he says he longs for his work more than he ever did ; and only the hearers are conscious that

the man has been outworn by all-claiming, all-dominating time. The statesman, too, has lost his wizardry : he cannot see afar off ; yet he supposes himself to be as great as in his most lustrous prime. All these are common incidents, and are referred to simply to show that they point towards the most disastrous effect of all—that a man may have lost the Spirit of God, and not be aware of his loss. Others look on, and pity him. The prayer has lost its pleading tone ; the tears which stream from his eyes are but common water ; the upward look sees nothing but cloud ; the universe has become a great blank space : the stars glitter, but say nothing ; the summer comes, but creates no garden in his soul ; and the man does not know it. Who dare tell him ? This points towards a possible ghastly condition of affairs. The Church is as large as ever, but Ichabod is written upon its door. The old words are all said, one by one with formal pomp and accuracy, but they are only words—no longer bushes that burn and are not consumed. Again and again remember that the point is that the man did not know it. Had he known it, he would have been a better man ; had he really felt that the Lord had gone out from him, he might have begun to cry at last like a child, if he could not pray like a priest. How is it with us ? Put the question right into the very centre of the soul. We may have more words, more dogmas, more points of controversy, more little orthodox idols ; but what are we in the heart, the spirit, the purpose of the mind ? Seeing that this great danger is before us, there is one sweet prayer which every day should carry to heaven from our pleading soul. A child can pray it ; an angel cannot add to it. That deep, high, grand, all-inclusive prayer is—“ Take not thy Holy Spirit from me,”—take health, take friends, take happiness, take all the world values as good and necessary, but take not thy Holy Spirit from me ! “ Holy Spirit, dwell with me.”

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, our hope is in thy Son ; other hope in,very deed we have none. We have hewn out unto ourselves cisterns, but we have found them to be cisterns that could hold no water. So by this experience, so sad and deep, we have come to know that there is no help for man but in the living God, the Saviour of all, who will have all men to be saved. We lay down our arms of rebellion, we renounce our various inventions, and we now come to thee, empty-handed, full of sin in the heart, conscious of great and aggravated wickedness, and casting ourselves upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, we say each for himself, God be merciful to me a sinner! We know thine answer; it is a reply of love: where sin abounds, grace shall much more abound; wherein we have grieved thee, we shall be mightily brought back again to thy side, to take part in thy praise, and to be active in thy service. May the time that is past more than suffice; may our inquiry be about the few days that remain; with earnestness, simplicity, fidelity, may we gird ourselves to the work that lies before us, and with all-burning zeal, most constant love, may we do thy will gladly, hoping only for a reward in thine own heaven. Help us in all our life. Its necessities are as numerous as its moments. Our life is one crying want. Let our life be turned into a sacred prayer, by being lifted upwards towards the all-hospitable heavens, and no longer left to grope in the earth for that which can never be found there. As for our burdens, we shall forget them if thou dost increase our strength; our sins shall be cast behind thee, our duty shall be our delight, and our whole life a glowing and acceptable sacrifice. Guide men who are in perplexity; soothe the hearts that are overborne by daily distress; save from despair those who think they have tried every gate and beaten upon every door without success or reply: save such from the agony and blackness of despair; at the very last do thou appear, a shining light, a delivering day, wherein men can see what lies about them, and address themselves to their tasks with the help of the sun. Be round about us in business; save us amid a thousand temptations; direct us along a road that is sown with traps, and gins, and snares; take hold of our hand every step of the journey, and in thine own good time bring us to rest, to death—to life. Amen.

Judges xvii.

[“A wholly disconnected narrative here follows, without any mark of time by which to indicate whether the events preceded or followed those narrated in the preceding chapter. The only point of contact with the preceding history of Samson is that we are still concerned with the tribe of Dan.—*The Speaker's Commentary.*]

1. And there was [before the days of Samson] a man of mount Ephraim, whose name was Micah [a contraction of Micayahû = who is like Jehovah].

2. And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver [£136] that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst [thou didst adjure; see Matt. xxvi. 65], and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. [See Prov. xxviii. 24.] And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my son.

3. And when he had restored the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, his mother said, I had wholly dedicated [consecrating, I consecrated] the silver unto the Lord from my hand for my son, to make a graven image and a molten image: now therefore I will restore it unto thee.

4. Yet [And] he restored the money unto his mother; and his mother took two hundred shekels of silver, and gave them to the founder [see Isaiah's opinion of founders, xlvi. 6-20], who made thereof a graven image and a molten image: and they were in the house of Micah.

5. And the man Micah had an house of gods, and made an ephod, and teraphim, and consecrated [installed] one of his sons, who became his priest.

6. In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes. [See this forbidden in Deut. xii. 8.]

7. And there was a young man out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family [tribe] of Judah, who was a Levite, and he sojourned there. [See Gen. xlix. 7.]

8. And the man departed out of the city from Beth-lehem-judah to sojourn where he could find a place: and he came to mount Ephraim to the house of Micah [probably having heard of Micah's chapel], as he journeyed.

9. And Micah said unto him, Whence comest thou? And he said unto him, I am a Levite of Beth-lehem-judah, and I go to sojourn where I may find a place.

10. And Micah said unto him, Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest, and I will give thee ten shekels [the shekel weighed about half an ounce] of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals. So the Levite went in.

11. And the Levite was content to dwell with the man; and the young man was unto him as one of his sons.

12. And Micah consecrated the Levite [which none might lawfully do but the high-priest]; and the young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah.

13. Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest [see next chapter for the answer].

A SERIES OF SURPRISES.

THE book of Judges properly closes with the sixteenth chapter. What follows after the sixteenth chapter has been described as an appendix—two appendices, indeed, dealing with the case of two Levites. From the seventeenth chapter onward the matter was probably written long before other

portions of the book, in the days of Joshua and the greater judges. Certainly, this part of the book was written when there was no king in Israel, and when every man was left to do that which was right in his own eyes. The history of the two Levites is full of romantic interest. The first history is to be read aloud and preached about quite freely; the second is to be read in secret—hardly read at all, and yet fully comprehended, because of the following chapter in which vengeance, just and tremendous, is dealt out to men who inflicted upon Israel a scandal that was never forgotten. Let us publicly and openly read the case of the first Levite, and then read in shame and secrecy what follows; then come into the light once more, and close the book of Judges amid a blaze of glory.

Is not this a fair picture of life? What undulation! What incessant variety! what visions of beauty! what disclosures of shame! how bright is the fair, great heaven; and yet how near the deep and awful hell! Micah dwelt in mount Ephraim, and stole silver from his mother: Micah afterwards became a maker of gods. What rapid transitions in character! what wonder if the rapidity of the transitions sometimes excites suspicion as to the reality of the conversion? But is not history condensed? The verses read in flowing sequence, as if no time had elapsed between one line and another: hence the shock with which we come upon the fact that the man who was but yesterday a concealed criminal is to-day a manufacturer of gods and churches. Is there not a punctuation in life which is inserted by the hand of God? Are not the observers to blame for a good deal of what is called unnatural and too swift transition in character? Who knows what may happen in one hour when God is the minister and a repentant soul is the subject? Sometimes life is wrought out very swiftly, so far as public observation can detect; yet it is being lived very slowly in the consciousness of the man: he is so fired with pain because of conscious sin that he would have himself transported in unnamable swiftness of time into a new consciousness and a blessed individuality. At the same time, a sober lesson does reveal itself at this very point. Whilst conversion may scarcely be too sudden, the manufacture of gods and churches ought not to take place with indecent haste, if at all. It is difficult to believe that a man can spring at one bound from

being a concealed felon into being a patron of the universe—a builder of gates that open heaven, a creator of altars and priests. There should be some time spent in solitude, in secrecy, in earnest wrestling prayer: the whole night should be thus spent, and the morning light will shine upon a new personality, bearing a new and larger name. At the same time, recognising the sobriety and gravity of the lesson, let no man be discouraged should he really feel what by its purity must be a divine impulse to move instantly and to act like a man who, having wasted many days, seeks to redeem the time, and to make one day as long as two, by diligent industry, by the passion of consecrated love.

This chapter is full of surprises. What can be more surprising than that a layman should consecrate a priest? This is what Micah did. Micah began where he could. Everything was to be done at once. So Micah consecrated one of his sons, who became his priest. Men do things in high passion which would be unnatural and almost irrational if done in cold blood. We must always calculate the influence of spiritual temperature upon human action. Some things we must have heard, and not read; the whole meaning was in the way of saying them. The Bible only tells us that certain persons “cried unto the Lord,”—verily a poor report, utterly inadequate, yet all that was possible: for who can write down a “cry”? who can paint, even in letters, an agony? So some allowance must be made for the new spiritual passion of Micah. A man can do great things when he is really on fire. No man knows himself, as to the full volume and bulk of his being, until he is possessed—no longer a little measurable self, but part of an infinite immeasurable totality. We speak of men being “mighty in prayer.” They cannot account for it. Yet they know that sometimes they have hold of God, and that omnipotence graciously yields to the gracious violence. Indeed, man must at certain historical periods make priests. Whether we are in such a historical period now, is not the immediate question, but following the unfolding of history along the biblical line we see how now and again man must be almost almighty. Despair finds new energies. Religious despair, religious helplessness, finds God, or makes an image supposed to be like him. Do not let us mock at idolatry of a really heathen kind too flippantly; there may be an aspect of idolatry that touches our

sense of the ludicrous, but there is also an aspect of it which touches our tears. To be an idolater in a Christian land is not only an anachronism, it is a blasphemy: but follow the whole history of idolatry and study its pathetic side, and see if it be not true that in man's attempts to make gods, and altars, and priests, there is something infinitely touching. To that mystery in our being a divine revelation may one day be made. It may be at that very point God will begin the miracle of self-revelation—of incarnation. Man must have a priest. There are necessities which cannot be denied—urgencies of soul which must be appeased, soothed, if not gratified. Are not all men looking round—some hopelessly and indistinctly—for helpers, spiritual assistants, for brother-men larger than they and altogether mightier in the nobler life, to lift them up, to eke out their poor expressions, to find prayers which their poor lips may utter as if their own? Is there not something in the heart that cries—"Master, Lord, teach us how to pray"? The fault does not lie in the impulse, but in its perversion; nay, rather, there is an unmistakable touch and signature of divinity in the impulse. Blessed are they who have received the ministry of sanctification and have responded to the divine provision made for great human passions, and great spiritual necessities. Yet no man can make a priest. Priests are the miracles of manhood—men who have the gift of prayer, men who by looking on human sorrow are moved heavenward to intercede on man's behalf. A strange gift, signalised by fire, is that of being able to pray in every tongue, so that every man may hear in the tongue in which he was born an interpretation of his soul's poverty and need. Such intercessors are not made by man: these are the gifts of God to every age. "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." Yet this is confining the idea of priesthood to intercession. If it be so confined, what possible objection can be lodged against it? To make a priest anything more than one who is mighty in prayer, mighty in sympathy, keen in moral insight, patient more than woman, is not the work of man.

A surprising thing it is that a converted thief should elaborate a religious system: "And the man Micah had an house of gods and made an ephod"—a gorgeous priestly robe—"and

teraphim"—little Syrian images. This is a condensed statement. Who can go into the detail of these two lines? "An house of gods"—a consecrated place—a gods' house: what patience in the elaboration of the deities; what painstaking in the fabrication of the ephod; what detailed and critical, if not artistic, care, in the shaping of the teraphim; we are apt to overlook the detail of all worship. Look upon the poorest little church, on the bleakest hillside, and what does it look like but a handful of stones rudely put together,—a sight that might be remarked upon at the moment, and passed by and forgotten? yet who can tell the history of these few stones? who knows with what hands they were carried and shaped and put in place? who knows how the labourers toiled when the day's work was done that they might put up the simple structure, to have a home in which to worship God? Who knows at what sacrifice the Bible was bought by these poor peasant worshippers, how small sums were laid by from week to week, and how as the little pile neared maturity the thrifty one almost had the Bible by the anticipation of love, how the Bible was preserved, loved, almost worshipped? Do not let us pass by all these things carelessly as if they meant nothing; they are full of tears, full of pathos, full of that finest quality of manhood which is the real wealth of any nation.

Yet Micah was ill at ease. Who can make one of his own sons into his superior? The son was but a makeshift after all. How superstition tyrannises over men! To have a son for a priest as Micah had was like a kind of illicit marriage. A sense of unnaturalness marred the service. The son was quite right in many respects, worthy of confidence and honour and love; but in his official capacity he was still a son. Who does not like his minister to come down out of the clouds? Who likes to see a minister grow up before his very eyes—to know the child at home, to follow the boy at school, to see him pass through various processes, and at length appear as a recognised minister of Christian truth? Who does not feel slightly uneasy if he knows the minister's mother and brothers and sisters? Who does not say, "Are they not all with us? Is not this the carpenter's son"? To some people, if a man is once a carpenter's son, he never can

be anything else by all the miracles of Heaven. Why? Because they themselves could never be anything else: they measure themselves in measuring him. Who does not like a species of ghostliness to be round about a minister? Who likes to think that his minister eats and drinks and sleeps? In very deed, some quite hide that aspect of the ministry and graciously pay no attention to it. Micah was but a man. It would be a beautiful thing if ministers could come down from the clouds and go back to the clouds, and we could have nothing to do with them but enjoy a momentary revelation. This has many applications. The man who felt somewhat uneasy or dissatisfied as to his son being priest, represents a great many men. Who could be so grand a minister as the brother sitting at our side, who, suddenly inflamed by the divine presence, rises and speaks to human need in human speech? If we were not so little, so superstitious, so denuded of the higher and sublimer reason, we should find in man—known man—our truest representative. It is because we have misunderstood humanity that we have undervalued the true ministry.

But fortune seemed to be upon Micah's side. We are now in times of wandering and adventure and bold enterprise, and in those times a young man was travelling out of Beth-lehem-judah of the family of Judah, and he happened to be a real Levite; and when he came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, Micah elicited his story, and instantly said to him, "Dwell with me, and be unto me a father and a priest." The Levites in those days were driven about. It was mourned in one of the prophetic books that the portion of the Levites was withheld from them. They were under Heaven's frown:—"I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." So this young man was wandering, more or less in a spirit of enterprise and curiosity; and he came, as we now say, by chance to the house of Micah. There was something interesting about him. He certainly was not a money-seeker; the terms were these:—"And I will give thee ten shekels of silver by the year, and a suit of apparel, and thy victuals" (v. 10)—twenty-five shillings a year was not much for a priest, even including one suit of clothes and victuals. A man who had spent hundreds of shekels upon his gods thought he

was liberal in spending five-and-twenty shillings a year on his priests ! There are persons who think more of the church as a building than of the minister as a servant of the soul. Who was this Levite ? Was he a man of any name ? Not much in himself, but he was the grandson of Moses. To what adversities may we come in life, and to what "base uses" ! The grandson of Moses, the caretaker of Syrian images, and the priest of an idolater ! Who can say to what we may be driven ? Once let the centre go ; once depart from the vital point ; take one step in a wrong direction, and who can calculate the issue ? Be steadfast ; hold on to the ascertained—to that which is proved to be beneficent, pure, noble ; or you may come into a servility which not only disennobles you but throws unjustly a slur on the most famous memory. No man liveth unto himself. We have to take care of the past, if we would really take care of the future. Now Micah was comparatively happy. Micah consecrated the Levite. The Levite was not a priest, but he seemed to have an odour of sanctity about him, and, for the rest, Micah, having once got his hand into priest-making, made no account of it. The young man became his priest, and was in the house of Micah ; then Micah was at rest.

The greatest surprise of all remains. Here is an idolater appealing to the true God ! "Then said Micah, Now know I that the Lord will do me good, seeing I have a Levite to my priest" (v. 13). Here is a false worshipper unconsciously throwing off his own idols ! He keeps the idols as men keep cabinets of curiosities. He has a house, a little museum, a small miniature pantheon ; but in his finer moods he appeals to the true and living God. So literal are we, we like to have something to lay the hand upon. Men like a substantial and visible religion. Yet Micah felt that God would do him good, seeing he had a Levite for his priest. The son did not quite fill up the space, but now with a real living Levite on the premises, the Lord—the eternal God, the Father of every living thing—will do this man of mount Ephraim good. How we degrade God,—that is to say, how we misconceive him and misrepresent him to ourselves ! The Lord will do us good if our heart is right towards him. The Lord will make up for the absence of all priests, ministers

churches, books, and ordinances, if we are unable to avail ourselves of such help : God will allow us to eat the shewbread, if there be no other food with which to appease our hunger. The true Church is where the right heart is. God himself is a Spirit. There is no image of him that can be made by human hands. There is one Priest—Jesus Christ, the true Melchizedek. He alone can sacrifice and has sacrificed and is sacrificed for us. There is one altar—the cross—the cross of Jesus Christ : God forbid that we should even know any other altar than the cross of our redeeming, atoning, glorious Saviour. For what are we looking ? We cannot appease our deepest needs, silence our most poignant cries, by any manufactures possible to our ingenuity and skill : the Son of God is the Saviour of the world ; he is able to save unto the utmost all that come unto God by him, seeing that he ever liveth to make intercession for us. If any man should now say that he himself is needful to our communion with Heaven, he is more than wrong in opinion, the case is infinitely more serious than that which can be measured by mere mistakenness of judgment : he usurps the place of Christ, he dethrones the Son of God, he at least divides the prerogative of the one Advocate. This, then, is our Christian position : Man needs a priest—that Priest is Jesus Christ ; man needs communion with Heaven—that communion is spiritual ; man needs an answer to the agony of his own accusation—that answer is in the cross of Christ. These are great mysteries, but the soul may become reverently familiar with them, after great suffering, prolonged prayer, and simple trust in the living God.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou hast recorded thy name in thy house, and there thou wilt meet them that seek thee. The heart seeketh God in all its pain and need; the spirit crieth out for the living God, as a land that is thirsty cries out for the great rain. We bless thee for this hunger and for this thirst; a blessing follows this desire, for this desire is none other than the gift of God. Now we know the meaning of the blessing pronounced upon those who hunger and thirst after righteousness. Hereby know we that we are not of the earth earthy, but that we have in us the fire of God, the spark of deity, the mysterious power which makes us thy children. We cannot be satisfied with what we see, or hear, or touch; beyond all this we have needs they cannot satisfy. Our satisfaction is in the living God; our rest is in heaven; we are at peace only when we are reconciled unto God by our Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and now we rejoice as those who have entered into harmony with the spirit of heaven, and to whom is reserved an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Our joy is pure; our peace is unspeakable; our heaven has begun below. We bless thee for all that is meant by the name Jesus Christ; in it is all eternity, and in it is all time; it is the music of creation; it is the Gospel addressed to human hearts; it is a refuge in time of need. When we need refuge, Jesus Christ is more to us than at any other time; when we feel our own littleness, then we see Christ's majesty. We come to the throne by the way of the cross. We bring with us no virtue of our own, but crying necessity, burning pain, consciousness of a great void; and yet we bring with us also a great hope; we feel that we shall not be disappointed whilst we linger at the cross, and pray where Jesus died. Our heart is full of thankfulness because of thy great mercy and care. Every day witnesses to thy tender loving-kindness. Thou dost live for thy creation; thou dost live in it, and through it all thou dost send currents of life, utterances of music, gospels of grace. So would we live that we may enter into thy purpose, and embody it, and realise it to those who look on. This being our desire, it shall surely be answered; for thou canst not deny thine own inspirations: these longings are part of the yearning of thine own solicitude. Thou wilt reply to us graciously, even when thou dost contradict and repel us in the mere letter. Why should we importune thee in the letter, when thou hast taught us to pray in the spirit and to fall into happy harmony with all thy will, first crucifying ourselves with Christ, and then having known the fellowship of his sufferings, knowing also the power of his resurrection? We will cast ourselves into thine hands, not daring to utter one petition lest we should offend thy

purpose, but comprehending all our prayer in the one complete desire that thy will may be done on earth as it is done in heaven. We bless thee for all the hints of a better life, which we obtain from the existence through which we are now passing: we are walking in the night-time; we have nothing but the stars to read; but they are thy lights; thou hast set them in appointed places; thou hast taught them to glitter according to thy will, and to speak to the observant eye in significant light: and are not the breezes, too, full of hints of a better land? are they not tinctured with a fragrance not of earth? do they not come to us bringing health and revival and sweetness—all hints of a greater state? And the earth is for man: it is full of symbol and suggestion and strange writing, to be made out by the scholars of Christ. We will walk on—now up the steep places, wishing they were not so high; now down into the valleys, wishing they were not so long: but thou wilt not allow these selfish wishes to mar the perfectness of our resignation when we say with the spirit, Thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. All our ways are in thine hands. Keep us wherever we are; keep us near the altar, near the cross, and thus near thine own heaven. We commend one another always to thy gracious keeping: we can only be kept as we are held in the hollow of thine hand: outside that hand there is no security; within it is the security of almightiness. Help us in all good purposes; give us steadfastness therein—that sacred determination, that faithful constancy, which comes of conviction akin to inspiration. Be with all who are on the sea—that great, wide, troubled sea. Be with all our friends who are far away—in the colonies, in other lands, speaking other languages, seeking to establish friendly relations with other peoples, struggling for bread, promoting the interests of civilisation, living a hard life that they may make the lives of others easier. Forget not our sick-chambers—the churches in our homes, the abodes of pain, chambers set apart for whispering, and thought, and patience, and prayer. Be with all persons in difficulty, extremity, intolerable anxiety, and grant unto such answers to their pain from heaven; then shall they sing in the night-time and glory exceedingly even in tribulation, knowing the dominion of God in human life, and answering with glad belief the gospel that thou doest all things well. Let thy word flame like a sun, or descend like the dew, or breathe into our hearts like the still small voice. Let it come as thou wilt, under what symbol thou dost ordain, only let it come—a word of emancipation, a word of benediction, a word of comfort, gracious as the speech of Christ, and sacred as his blood. Amen.

Judges xviii.

1. In those days there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe [may mean a tribe, or the division of a tribe] of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance [a description of their inheritance is given in Josh. xix. 40-46] had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel.

2. And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coast [their lords], men of valour [sons of force], from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it; and they said unto them, Go, search the land: and when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they

lodged there [Pythias was rich enough to entertain the whole army of Xerxes, a million men, yet he died a beggar].

3. When they were by the house of Micah, they knew the voice [perhaps by its dialect. He had lived in Bethlehem] of the young man the Levite : and they turned in thither [into the room where he was officiating], and said unto him, Who brought thee hither? and what makest thou in this place? and what hast thou here?

4. And he said unto them, Thus and thus [according to this and according to that] dealeth Micah with me, and hath hired me, and I am his priest [because of the dearth of priests, Jeroboam made priests of the lowest of the people].

5. And they said unto him [having seen glittering ephods], Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God [for censure upon such inquiry, see Isa. xxx. 4; Hosea iv. 12], that we may know whether our way which we go shall be prosperous.

6. And the priest said unto them, Go in peace : before the Lord is your way wherein you go [carefully ambiguous].

7. Then the five men departed, and came to Laish [the mound of the judge], and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians [they were supposed to be a colony from Zidon], quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man [some read—they had no business with Syria].

8. And they came unto their brethren to Zorah and Eshtaol : and their brethren said unto them, What say ye?

9. And they said, Arise, that we may go up against them : for we have seen the land, and, behold, it is very good [Num. xiv. 7; Josh. ii. 23, 24] : and are ye still? be not slothful to go, and to enter to possess the land.

10. When ye go, ye shall come unto a people secure, and to a large land [wide on both hands] : for God hath given it into your hands; a place where there is no want of any thing that is in the earth.

11. And there went from thence of the family of the Danites, out of Zorah and out of Eshtaol, six hundred men appointed [girded] with weapons of war.

12. And they went up, and pitched in Kirjath-jearim [city of forests : nine miles from Jerusalem] in Judah : wherefore they called that place Mahanehdan [camp of Dan] unto this day : behold, it is behind [to the west of] Kirjath-jearim.

13. And they passed thence unto mount Ephraim, and came into the house of Micah [or precincts of the god-house].

14. Then answered the five men that went to spy out the country of Laish, and said unto their brethren, Do ye know that there is in these houses an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image? now therefore consider what ye have to do [whether, and how, you would possess yourself of them].

15. And they turned thitherward, and came to the house of the young man [Jonathan] the Levite, even unto the house of Micah, and saluted him ["won with an apple, lost with a nut"].

16. And the six hundred men appointed with their weapons of war, which were of the children of Dan, stood by the entering of the gate.

17. And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image : and the priest stood in the entering of the gate [having been inveigled thither to talk to the six hundred men] with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war.

18. And these went into Micah's house, and fetched the carved image, the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image [not to destroy but to worship]. Then said the priest unto them, What do ye ?

19. And they said unto him, Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth [finger on the lip, is the attitude of the Egyptian god of silence], and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest : is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel [the papists offered Luther the cardinalate to be quiet] ?

20. And the priest's heart was glad [and this was a grandson of Moses], and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people [where he was well guarded].

21. So they turned and departed, and put the little ones [so it was a regular migration] and the cattle and the carriage [the baggage] before them [expecting to be pursued].

22. And when they were a good way from the house of Micah, the men that were in the houses near to Micah's house were gathered together, and overtook the children of Dan.

23. And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company [the grim humour of a tribe like a serpent on the way, an adder in the path, Gen. xlix. 17] ?

24. And he said, Ye have taken away my gods [remember Laban, Gen. xxx. 31] which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away : and what have I more ? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee ?

25. And the children of Dan said unto him, Let not thy voice be heard among us, lest angry fellows [men bitter of soul] run upon thee, and thou lose thy life, with the lives of thy household.

26. And the children of Dan went their way : and when Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned and went back unto his house.

27. And they took the things which Micah had made, and the priest which he had, and came unto Laish, unto a people that were at quiet and secure : and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and burnt the city with fire ["Dan was no gainer. His name disappears from the records of 1 Chron. iv. 1, and he is not mentioned among the elected tribes in Rev. vii."].

28. And there was no deliverer, because it was far from Zidon, and they had no business with any man ; and it was in the valley that lieth by Beth-rehob [at the foot of the lowest range of Lebanon]. And they built a city, and dwelt therein.

29. And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father, who was born unto Israel ; howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first.

30. And the children of Dan set up the graven image [some say it was in

the form of a calf]; and Jonathan [the name has been withheld until this moment], the son of Gershom, the son of Manasseh, he and his sons were priests to the tribe of Dan until the day of the captivity of the land [probably the Philistine captivity].

31. And they set them up Micah's graven image, which he made, all the time that the house of God was in Shiloh.

MICAH'S SORROW.

WE now reach a very disturbed state of the history of Israel. All is anarchy. We have thus an opportunity of seeing what men will do when they are left to themselves without government, discipline, sense of social or natural responsibility. We shall see what the bridge is when the keystone has dropped out of it. We are told again and again in these latter chapters that "there was no king in Israel," so "every man did that which was right in his own eyes." What is the meaning of this? The meaning goes further back than the mere letter; there was no king in Israel, because in Israel there was no God. The Lord is King. You cannot have a king if you have not a God. There was no nominal renunciation of God, no public and blatant atheism, no boastful impiety; there was a deadlier heresy—namely, keeping God as a sign but paying no tribute to him as a King, worshipping him possibly in outward form but knowing nothing of the subduing and directing power of godliness. That is more to be dreaded than any intellectual difficulty of a theological kind. Intellectual heresies can do but little to impede the progress of the kingdom of truth; but dead consciences, prayerless prayers, mechanical formalities—these are the impediments which overturn for a time the chariot of Progress. This was the case in Israel. Where God is the king is. Not in any limited and measurable sense, as a man with a crown on, constituted of so much gold and so many precious stones; but a king in the sense of kingliness, sovereignty, authority, rule—the spirit of obligation and responsibility. You may have a king under any form of government. Republicanism itself is monarchical. You find the monarch everywhere—the right monarch where you find the right God. Herein is the utility of spreading far and wide right conceptions of the divine Being, as Sovereign, Father, Shepherd, Judge; let such concep-

tions be received into the mind ; let them constitute part of the very substance of life, and you need not exhort men to keep correct weights and measures, and to pay the wages of the hireling ; where the sovereign idea is right, and the supreme and dominating conviction is pure and noble, every finger of the hands serves the living God, and the whole breath is a continual sacrifice upon the altar of Righteousness. So, without going into narrow definitions of terms, we rest on the broad philosophy and reason that a right conception of God means a right conception of Man ; a true, deep, complete love of God means an equal love of one's neighbour ; a true theology, properly understood, is the uppermost side of a true morality.

Every man was king in the anarchical days of Israel. What does anarchy do for society ? Anarchy and society are irreconcilable terms. Where *Self* is king there can be no society ; the ghastly image of it must be symbolical of injustice. The illustration and proof are found in this very chapter. Dan went out to see what could be had :—

“The children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to search it ; and they said unto them, Go, search the land ” (v. 2).

In other words : Let us see what can be done. They followed the good old rule, the simple plan,—Let those take who have the power ; Let those keep who can. This is the history of anarchy in a couplet : the strongest is the wisest, might is right, usurpation is justice. Things are turned upside down in their moral relations and applications when the great central thought is destroyed. Here a curious incident occurred. Dan, searching out the land and seeing what could be done, “knew the voice of the young man the Levite,” in the house of Micah ; “and they turned in thither, and said unto him, Who brought thee hither ? and what makest thou in this place ? and what hast thou here ?”—(v. 3). Such are the coincidences of life—the little points at which so-called providences are created by selfishness and injustice. Singular chances arise, and we construe these into visitations of Heaven, made directly on our behalf. The young man explained his circumstances ; and the children of Dan said unto him : “Ask counsel, we pray thee, of God, that we may know whether our way which

we go shall be prosperous" (v. "5). Here you have social injustice connected with the holiest names. It is sad to see how religion has been abused. It is mysterious, beyond all other mystery, to note how men, given up to injustice, usurpation, and plunder, must now and again be religious. Thieves go to church as well as honest men. Again and again it strikes the roughest mind and the most ill-treated conscience that another attempt at prayer may be an excellent investment. For irony, look to the history of the human conscience; read the history of the Christian Church. Men have thought they could build their way half up to heaven with stones taken by unjust hands out of the quarries of earth. Men "have stolen the livery of the court of heaven to serve the devil in." Men, who would not for a moment deny God in words, have denied and rejected him in action. We should analyse our prayers, and cross-examine ourselves at the altar, and keep a strict watch upon ourselves at the holy board,—even there the whole nature should undergo a species of vivisection, that out of its agony we may extort the truth.

The seventh verse presents a picture of the dangers of solitariness and self-security :—

"Then the five men departed, and came to Laish, and saw the people that were therein, how they dwelt careless, after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure; and there was no magistrate in the land, that might put them to shame in any thing; and they were far from the Zidonians, and had no business with any man."

These circumstances have a wide application. They must not be limited by geographical lines, for they apply to the history of civilisation and to the position of every man in human society. There is a solitariness which means weakness; there is a "carelessness" which amounts to a temptation to those who behold it. Is this not so with regard to *mind*? Are there not persons who have intellectually no commerce with the world?—they read no books, they hear no discourses, they listen not to the voice of education or of progress; they live retrospectively; they live upon themselves, and are in a sense suicides. This intellectual solitariness is often but another name for weakness. We should know all men, all nations, all languages; all civilisations should be familiar to us. Without such large commerce with the world

we shall become little and less and less, day by day, falling swiftly backward to the vanishing point. We should travel more ; otherwise we shall think that one country is the world, and be amused with a fool's merriment when we hear of what is being done, in some distant kind of way, by nations which we are conceited enough to pronounce "foreign." There should be no "foreign" nations now. Modern civilisation should have rendered that an impossibility. Every language should be a man's mother-tongue—in the ideal of it, in the innermost meaning of it ; not that it is possible literally and mechanically, but perfectly possible sympathetically and philanthropically. It is sad to see people dwelling within their own little sect, wondering how other persons can have the "audacity" to differ from them—forgetting that they themselves have the "audacity" to differ from other people. Why this fear of man ? We should be familiar with the history of barbarism, so far as it may be said to have a history ; or we should construct a history out of what we know concerning it, and out of the history extract a philosophy. This is the way to rebuke our own mind, to humble our own ambition, and to have our asperities struck off or smoothed down, by a large and continuous friction. So it should be in Christian culture. All Christian communions should intermingle. They would do one another good. They can never be constituted into one mechanical society, because of temperament, but they can realise a common brotherhood, because they may be stronger at the point of agreement than they are at the point of difference. What havoc the enemy makes upon solitary Christians ! Sympathy is strength. Little trust is little support. No one Church can be the whole Church of the living God. But who does not like to live "quietly," and "carelessly"—that is, without care, not indifference—at home, sitting, as we say, under his own vine and fig-tree ? If there is a pitiable sight on the whole earth to-day, it is to see a man sitting under his own vine and fig-tree, when the rest of the world is in poverty, weakness, or necessity. Times there will be, sabbatic and sacred, when there will be sense of home, sense of security, sense of the blessedness of having a vine and fig-tree ; but that should never be the dominating feeling in the Christian breast ; the dominating feeling should rather be one of large-heartedness, spreading a table for every

man, asking a blessing in every language, and preaching a gospel to every creature. This was Christ's life ; this was Christ's philosophy ; this was Christ's practice. Let us be followers together of Christ, of God, "as dear children."

The history having advanced so far, and the men of Dan having reported that they had found in certain houses "an ephod, and teraphim, and a graven image, and a molten image," a singular transaction took place:—

"And the five men that went to spy out the land went up, and came in thither, and took the graven image, and the ephod, and the teraphim, and the molten image : and the priest stood in the entering of the gate with the six hundred men that were appointed with weapons of war" (v. 17).

This was a capture of shrines and images. Rather than not have a god they thought it better to steal one ; and having stolen the gods, of course they stole the priest. They put a case to him, saying : "Hold thy peace, lay thine hand upon thy mouth, and go with us, and be to us a father and a priest : is it better for thee to be a priest unto the house of one man, or that thou be a priest unto a tribe and a family in Israel?"—(v. 19). It was an appeal to ambition. That was offering the man a "larger sphere of usefulness." We have seen what his salary was in the house of Micah—namely, twenty-five shillings a year, a suit of clothes, and his victuals. Now comes a "call of Providence." Woe be unto us when we receive intimations of Providence through the lips of thieves ! Distrust the devil even when he preaches a good doctrine ; repel him even when he quotes Scripture by chapter and verse. What was the answer of the grandson of Moses ? "And the priest's heart was glad, and he took the ephod, and the teraphim, and the graven image, and went in the midst of the people"—(v. 20). To trust a thievish priest one would say would be impossible. But such contradictions are repeated in human history. The children of Dan knew that all had been stolen, including the priest himself, and yet they had some kind of grim trust in all this wild arrangement. Truly, there was no king in Israel ; truly, there was no God in Israel ! We should simplify our relations to great central truths. We have managed, by some process not to be explained in words, to turn religion into a great complication, so that, not understanding it, we often pervert it. To what humilia-

tion may the human intellect and conscience be reduced! To think that stolen images could do any good! On the other hand, to suppose that the gods stolen should consent to be the protecting divinities of thieves! Yet this is the danger of every day's religious experience—namely, the danger of a perverted conscience, an unbalanced judgment, a blurred confusion as to moral relations and obligations, so that having brought ourselves into intellectual and spiritual tumult, we justify our bad conduct by our bad metaphysics! Men may steal a god, but they cannot steal a character. They may take away a whole house of gods—as Micah's building was called—and yet have no living temple, no inner sanctuary, in which to worship and to love.

Micah's part in the matter is singularly illustrative of much that is taking place to-day. Micah having discovered the theft,

"overtook the children of Dan. And they cried unto the children of Dan. And they turned their faces, and said unto Micah, What aileth thee, that thou comest with such a company? And he said, Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and the priest, and ye are gone away: and what have I more? and what is this that ye say unto me, What aileth thee?" (vv. 22-24).

Micah had gods that could be taken away—have we any better divinities? Have we even a Bible that can be taken away? If so, we have no Bible at all. It is possible to make a mere idol of the Bible—possible to be most careful that no injury should be done to the book, and yet never to peruse its spiritual meaning and apply its spiritual doctrine. The Bible should not be outside of us—something that a thief can take away; it should be in us, part of us, so that a man stealing our Bible must first steal ourselves; for it is the very inspiration of memory, the very treasure of recollection, the very wealth of the soul. But where are the men to whom the Bible is thus much? The danger of Christ losing the battle—were such danger possible—would be in Christ's people neglecting Christ's Book. There is no volume held in such contempt as the Bible, even by some who profess to honour it. You cannot honour the Bible by binding it, gilding it, protecting it from dust and injury, walking round it, looking at it; you can only honour the Bible in one way, and that is by reading it, taking it into the soul, reproducing it in living literature, in epistles

"known and read of all men." A beautiful thing it seems to be to teach a child that even a king would not allow the Bible to be stood upon. The king was right, but he was only right in a limited sense. The true honouring of the Bible, let us say again and again, is having it dwelling in us richly, and reproducing continual fruitfulness in good.

The process of deprivation went on quickly. Having stolen a god, the thieves next stole a city; having corrupted a priest, they debased a memory; and they called the name of the stolen city Dan, "after the name of Dan their father." So swiftly may men run on the smooth road to hell! Once get the hand well into wickedness, and the rest comes by daily custom and practice. We sanctify our bad deeds by attaching to some of them the names of illustrious ancestors. How deceitful is the heart and desperately wicked! What a mixture is life! what lines of various hue are shot through and through this fabric of being! Here are men stealing gods, and asking counsel of Heaven; stealing a priest and all the shrines they could lay hold of, and then justifying themselves thereby in taking a city; seizing a city occupied by inoffensive people, burning it, building another upon its ashes, and calling it by the name of a dead man. Who can analyse human life? Who can really take to pieces the mystery of human action? The whole history is not bad; certainly the whole history is not good. This, indeed, is the summary of life. Where is there a man—speaking only now of the individual—who is all bad? Surely there is not one; surely the drunkard sometimes pauses in his madness to think some good thought of the days of long ago when he tried to pray; surely even the thief does not take everything, and partly excuses himself for having taken something by saying that he has left something untaken; surely the liar sometimes strikes some note of truth; surely the unjust man has a sudden impulse upon him which leads him to do not only justly but generously. And where is the man who is all good, without stain or taint or flaw or drawback? Where? So, on the one hand, we have some reason for hope; on the other, much reason for humility and continual self-examination. But the time of judgment is not yet. God will judge us all, and he will find out the supreme motive of life, and by that he will determine everything. This is a

gospel, and yet it is a judgment terrible to hear. Blessed be God, we stand in this conviction—namely, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” God dwelleth in the humble heart and contrite spirit. God cannot be stolen, though his image and symbol may. Blessed are they who have passed beyond the letter into the meaning of the spirit of things, knowing somewhat of God’s own heart and entering sympathetically into God’s own purpose; then though the literal Bible be burned, revelation remains untouched; though the church built with hands—“the sacrifice in stone”—is demolished, the temple indestructible is in the heart; though forms and ceremonies are unremembered things, the soul goes up in continual aspiration, seeking the living God and desiring only to be found in the living Christ.

SELECTED NOTE.

The worship in Micah’s house, in its object and intention, was the worship of Jehovah. Both mother and son did what they did “to the Lord.” Their “gods,” as they are called—their “images,” “teraphim”—were set up for the purpose of a service which was meant to honour “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” . . . They were significant emblems, something having a sacred meaning, which embodied religious ideas, and were to be used as a help in approaching God. They were visible types of spiritual things; material representations of what was unseen; vehicles, so to speak, by which the mind could be aided in rising upwards towards heaven, and through which divine virtue could flow down to man upon earth. It was the same with Aaron’s golden calf and the calves set up by Jeroboam. In each case the professed object of the service was Jehovah. The visible things were not to be worshipped; God was to be worshipped through them. “But the thing that was done displeased the Lord.” All such unauthorised attempts to aid devotion through “the likeness of anything in the heaven above or in the earth beneath” were rejected and stigmatised as sinful. Whenever employed, they “became a snare,” and “caused Israel to sin.”

Micah was, in his way, very religious. He was not pre-eminently honest; he had but a slight sense of relative duty, and cannot be supposed to have known much of personal moral culture. It is possible, indeed, that he stole his mother’s property with the pious intention of making it into images for “the honour of God.” His religion consisted in a blind and superstitious veneration for the outward and visible in divine worship, and in depending for spiritual grace (if ever he thought of that) on ceremony and ritual. Hence his anxiety to have “a father and a priest,” that the priest should be consecrated, that he should minister in the proper sacerdotal robe, and especially that he should be of the sacred tribe, and belong to the legitimate Levitical succession. His highest expectations were founded on this; not on *character*, either in the Levite or himself; not on intelligence and capacity to edify and instruct; simply on the fact that “he had a Levite for his priest.”—*Thomas Binney.*

JUDGES xix., xx. (ANNOTATED).

Judges xix.

1. And it came to pass in those days [not long after Joshua's death, and before Othniel was judge], when there was no king in Israel, that there was a certain Levite sojourning on the side of mount Ephraim, who took to him a concubine [such relations were not legally forbidden] out of Beth-lehem-judah.

2. And his concubine [wife or concubine,—a wife with inferior rights] played the whore against him, and went away from him [Prov. xxx. 21], unto her father's house to Beth-lehem-judah, and was there four whole months [literally, days four months; or, one year and four months].

3. And her husband arose, and went after her, to speak friendly [to speak to her heart] unto her, and to bring her again, having his servant with him and a couple of asses [one was meant to convey his wife]: and she brought him into her father's house: and when the father of the damsel saw him, he rejoiced to meet him.

4. And his father-in-law [so the relationship was recognised], the damsel's father, retained him [with hospitable and affectionate intentions]; and he abode with him three days: so they did eat and drink, and lodged there ["in token of hearty reconciliation"].

5. And it came to pass on the fourth day, when they arose early in the morning [to avoid the burning heat], that he rose up to depart ["It is good hearing when the Levite maketh haste home. An honest man's heart is where his calling is"]. And the damsel's father said unto his son-in-law, Comfort thine heart [literally, prop up thine heart] with a morsel of bread, and afterward go your way.

6. And they sat down, and did eat and drink both of them together: for the damsel's father had said unto the man, Be content, I pray thee, and tarry all night, and let thine heart be merry.

7. And when the man rose up to depart, his father-in-law urged him [to test his good intentions towards a faithless woman]: therefore he lodged there again.

8. And he arose early in the morning on the fifth day to depart: and the damsel's father said, Comfort thine heart, I pray thee. And they tarried [lingered] until afternoon, and they did eat both of them.

9. And when the man rose up to depart, he, and his concubine, and his servant, his father-in-law, the damsel's father, said unto him, Behold, now the day draweth toward evening [literally, is weak or has slackened to evening], I pray you tarry all night : behold, the day groweth to an end [literally, it is the bending or declining of the day], lodge here, that thine heart may be merry ; and to-morrow get you early on your way, that thou mayst go home [to thy tent].

10. But the man would not tarry that night, but he rose up and departed, and came over against Jebus [so called in the days of David], which is Jerusalem ; and there were with him two asses saddled ; his concubine also was with him.

11. And when they were by Jebus, the day was far spent [he had been detained too long by hospitality] ; and the servant said unto his master, Come, I pray thee, and let us turn in into this city of the Jebusites [which they would reach about five o'clock], and lodge in it.

12. And his master said unto him, We will not turn aside hither into the city of a stranger [think of Jerusalem being so described !], that is not of the children of Israel : we will pass over to Gibeah [the Gibeah of Saul,—the birthplace of the first king of Israel].

13. And he said unto his servant, Come, and let us draw near to one of these places to lodge all night, in Gibeah, or in Ramah [two miles beyond Gibeah].

14. And they passed on and went their way ; and the sun went down upon them when they were by Gibeah [which determined them to stay], which belongeth to Benjamin [there were many other Gibeahs in Palestine].

15. And they turned aside thither, to go in and to lodge in Gibeah [Poneropolis, or city of the Evil One] ; and when he went in [through the city gate], he sat him down in a street [open place, or square] of the city : for there was no man that took them into his house to lodging [Deut. x. 9]. [They would have gone on to Ramah, two miles farther north, had the daylight held out. Sunset in that latitude is almost immediately followed by darkness].

16. And, behold, there came an old man from his work out of the field at even [an old man ; an old man working ; an old man working out of doors], which was also of mount Ephraim [a fellow countryman of the Levite] ; and he sojourned in Gibeah : but the men of the place were Benjamites.

17. And when he had lifted up his eyes, he saw a wayfaring man in the street of the city : and the old man said, Whither goest thou ? and whence comest thou ?

18. And he said unto him, We are passing from Beth-lehem-judah toward the side of mount Ephraim [the depths of the hill country of mount Ephraim] ;

from thence am I : and I went to Beth-lehem-judah, but I am now going to the house of the Lord [or, I am a Levite engaged in the service of the Tabernacle at Shiloh] ; and there is no man that receiveth me to house [Hesiod reckons this as supreme wickedness].

19. Yet there is both straw and provender [any grain fit for food of cattle] for our asses ; and there is bread and wine also for me and for thy handmaid, and for the young man which is with thy servants : there is no want of any thing.

20. And the old man said, Peace be with thee [not merely a greeting, but an assurance of help] ; howsoever let all thy wants lie upon me ; only lodge not in the street [Gen. xix. 2].

21. So he brought him into his house, and gave provender unto the asses [it was the custom of the East to attend first to the wants of the animals] : and they washed their feet, and did eat and drink.

22. Now as they were making their hearts merry, behold, the men of the city, certain sons of Belial [sons of worthlessness], beset the house round about, and beat at the door, and spake to the master of the house, the old man, saying, Bring forth the man that came into thine house, that we may know him [Hosea ix. 9].

23. And the man, the master of the house, went out unto them, and said unto them, Nay, my brethren, nay, I pray you, do not so wickedly ; seeing that this man is come into mine house [an appeal to the sacred rights of hospitality], do not this folly.

24. Behold, here is my daughter, a maiden [see from what depths the world has risen], and his concubine ; them I will bring out now, and humble ye them, and do with them what seemeth good unto you : but unto this man do not so vile a thing.

25. But the men would not hearken to him : so the man took his concubine, and brought her forth unto them ; and they knew her, and abused her all the night until the morning : and when the day began to spring, they let her go.

26. Then came the woman in the dawning of the day, and fell down at the door of the man's house where her lord was, till it was light.

27. And her lord rose up in the morning, and opened the doors of the house, and went out to go his way : and, behold, the woman his concubine was fallen down at the door of the house, and her hands were upon the threshold [as if in one last appeal of agony and despair].

28. And he said unto her, Up, and let us be going. But none answered. Then the man took her up upon an ass, and the man rose up, and gat him unto his place.

29. And when he was come into his house, he took a knife, and laid hold on his concubine, and divided her, together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and sent her into all the coast of Israel [that he might rouse a spirit of vengeance].

30. And it was so, that all that saw it said, There was no such deed done nor seen from the day that the-children of Israel came up out of the land of Egypt unto this day [and so soon after the death of Joshua]: consider of it, take advice, and speak your minds.

[The nineteenth chapter would be intolerable but for the twentieth; the two must be read together. When men remark upon the awful depravity of the one they should remember the awful vengeance of the other.]

Judges xx.

1. Then all the children of Israel went out, and the congregation [the whole community of Israel] was gathered together as one man [a phrase which disappears after the days of Solomon], from Dan even to Beer-sheba [from one extremity to another,—a proverbial expression for all Israel], with the land of Gilead [the transjordanic tribes], unto the Lord in Mizpeh [not the one mentioned in xi. 11].

2. And the chief [literally, the corner-stones] of all the people, even of all the tribes of Israel, presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, four hundred thousand [so the number had been diminished by one third] footmen that drew sword [the Israelites were forbidden to use either chariot or cavalry].

3. (Now the children of Benjamin heard that the children of Israel were gone up to Mizpeh.) Then said the children of Israel, Tell us, how was this wickedness?

4. And the Levite, the husband of the woman that was slain, answered and said, I came into Gibeah, that belongeth to Benjamin, I and my concubine, to lodge.

5. And the men [lords or masters] of Gibeah rose against me [“The Levite colours the story in a way most favourable to himself”], and beset the house round about upon me by night, and thought to have slain me: and my concubine have they forced, that she is dead.

6. And I took my concubine, and cut her in pieces, and sent her throughout all the country of the inheritance of Israel: for they have committed lewdness and folly in Israel.

7. Behold, ye are all children of Israel: give here your advice and counsel.

8. And all the people rose as one man [1 Sam. xi. 7], saying, We will not any of us go to his tent [the transjordanic tribes were principally graziers], neither will we any of us turn into his house.

9. But now this shall be the thing which we will do to Gibeah; we will go up by lot against it [“The shape of the ground probably made it impossible for the whole force to operate at once”]:

10. And we will take ten men of an hundred throughout all the tribes of Israel, and an hundred of a thousand, and a thousand out of ten thousand, to

fetch victual for the people, that they may do, when they come to Gibeah of Benjamin, according to all the folly that they have wrought in Israel.

11. So all the men of Israel were gathered against the city, knit together as one man [fellows of one college or club].

12. And the tribes of Israel sent men through all the tribe of Benjamin, saying, What wickedness is this that is done among you [even Benjamin had a chance of self-defence]?

13. Now therefore deliver us the men, the children of Belial, which are in Gibeah, that we may put them to death, and put away evil from Israel. [The verb implies extermination, such as the burning out of diseased flesh.] But the children of Benjamin would not hearken to the voice of their brethren the children of Israel [an evil solidarity] :

14. But [and] the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together out of the cities unto Gibeah, to go out to battle against the children of Israel :

15. And the children of Benjamin were numbered at that time out of the cities twenty and six thousand men [diminished by about a third since the census] that drew sword, beside the inhabitants of Gibeah, which numbered seven hundred chosen men.

16. Among all this people there were seven hundred chosen men [these words are omitted by the LXX. and the Vulgate] left-handed [not an accidental defect, but an acquired art]; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss [Cyrus valued his four hundred slingers].

17. And the men of Israel, beside Benjamin, were numbered four hundred thousand men that drew sword : all these were men of war.

18. And the children of Israel arose, and went up to the house of God [Bethel], and asked counsel of God [by the Urim and Thummim], and said, Which of us shall go up first to the battle against the children of Benjamin? And the Lord said, Judah shall go up first.

19. And the children of Israel rose up in the morning, and encamped against Gibeah.

20. And the men of Israel went out to battle against Benjamin; and the men of Israel put themselves in array to fight against them at Gibeah.

21. And the children of Benjamin came forth out of Gibeah [the whole tribe adopted the bad deed,—an evil *esprit de corps*], and destroyed down to the ground of the Israelites that day twenty and two thousand men.

22. And the people, the men of Israel, encouraged themselves, and set their battle again in array in the place where they put themselves in array the first day.

23. (And the children of Israel went up and wept before the Lord until even, and asked counsel of the Lord, saying, Shall I go up again to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother? [“showing a sort of compunction”] and the Lord said, Go up against him.)

24. And the children of Israel came near against the children of Benjamin the second day.

25. And Benjamin went forth against them out of Gibeah the second day, and destroyed down to the ground of the children of Israel again eighteen thousand men ; all these drew the sword.

26. Then all the children of Israel, and all the people, went up, and came unto the house of God, and wept [“The two battles must have caused an almost universal bereavement ”], and sat there before the Lord, and fasted that day until even, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings before the Lord.

27. And the children of Israel enquired of the Lord, (for the ark of the covenant of God was there in those days ;

28. And Phinehas [the noble and heroic grandson of Aaron], the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, stood before it in those days,) saying, Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin my brother, or shall I cease? And the Lord said, Go up ; for to-morrow [the first promise of success] I will deliver them into thine hand.

29. And Israel set liers in wait round about Gibeah [“acting with more humility, caution, and wisdom ”].

30. And the children of Israel went up against the children of Benjamin on the third day, and put themselves in array against Gibeah, as at other times.

31. And the children of Benjamin went out against the people, and were drawn away from the city ; and they began to smite of the people, and kill [the wounded or beaten of the people], as at other times, in the highways, of which one goeth up to the house of God [Bethel], and the other to Gibeah in the field [probably Geba, Josh. xxi. 17], about thirty men of Israel.

32. And the children of Benjamin said, They are smitten down before us, as at the first. But the children of Israel said, Let us flee, and draw them from the city unto the highways.

33. And all the men of Israel rose up out of their place, and put themselves in array at Baal-tamar [Lord of the palm] : and the liers in wait of Israel came forth out of their places, even out of the meadows [a word which occurs nowhere else] of Gibeah.

34. And there came against Gibeah ten thousand chosen men out of all Israel, and the battle was sore [Benjamin was attacked both in front and rear] : but [and] they knew not that evil was near them [that the hour of ruin had come],

35. And the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel : and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjamites that day twenty and five thousand and an hundred men : all these drew the sword.

36. So the children of Benjamin saw that they [the Israelites] were smitten : for the men of Israel gave place to the Benjamites, because they trusted unto the liers in wait which they had set beside Gibeah.

37. And the liers in wait hasted, and rushed [set upon ; see ix. 33] upon Gibeah ; and the liers in wait drew themselves along, and smote all the city with the edge of the sword [an expression which denotes extermination].

38. Now there was an appointed sign between the men of Israel and the liers in wait, that they should make a great flame with smoke rise up out of the city.

39. And when the men of Israel retired in the battle, Benjamin began to smite and kill of the men of Israel about thirty persons : for they said, Surely they are smitten down before us, as in the first battle.

40. But when the flame began to arise up out of the city with a pillar of smoke, the Benjamites looked behind them, and, behold, the flame of the city ascended up to heaven.

41. And when the men of Israel turned again, the men of Benjamin were amazed : for they saw that evil was come upon them.

42. Therefore they turned their backs before the men of Israel unto the way of the wilderness ; but the battle overtook them ; and them which came out of the cities [Benjamites] they destroyed in the midst of them [that is, in their own cities].

43. Thus they inclosed the Benjamites round about, and chased them, and trode them down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising. ["The language and construction of this verse is poetical ; it seems to be an extract from a song, and to describe, in the language of poetry, the same event which the preceding verse described in that of prose."]

44. And there fell of Benjamin eighteen thousand men ; all these were men of valour.

45. And they turned and fled toward the wilderness unto the rock of Rimmon [the rock of the pomegranate] ; and they gleaned of them in the highways five thousand men ; and pursued hard after them unto Gidom [mentioned nowhere else], and slew two thousand men of them.

46. So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were twenty and five thousand men that drew the sword ; all these were men of valour.

47. But six hundred men [compare 1 Sam. xiv. 2] turned and fled to the wilderness unto the rock Rimmon, and abode in the rock Rimmon four months.

48. And the men of Israel turned again upon the children of Benjamin, and smote them with the edge of the sword, as well the men of every city, as the beast, and all that came to hand : also they set on fire all the cities that they came to.

"Having utterly destroyed the Benjamite army, except the six hundred men who were shut up in Rimmon, the Israelites returned through the Benjamite country and put to death all the remaining inhabitants, destroyed the cattle and burnt the cities" (*The Speaker's Commentary*). Keeping the whole tragedy vividly in mind, we shall the more profitably enter upon the study of the following subject.

Judges xxi. 3.

"O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?"

ONE TRIBE LACKING.

THE spirit of this inquiry is the spirit of the whole Bible. It is, indeed, not so much an inquiry as a wail, a burst of sorrow, a very agony of kinship and disunion. The three-fold repetition of "Israel" indicates supreme distress. Israel was meant to be a unity—a constitution not only complete but inviolable—foursquare, without break or flaw, vital at every point—a noble integrity! And now Benjamin is threatened with extinction: Benjamin is not in the house of God. From the beginning, Benjamin was but a little tribe, the least of all in Israel, numbering at first from thirty to forty thousand fighting men. Over an extremely difficult and delicate question Benjamin came into conflict with the rest of Israel, and after an almost superhuman resistance was overborne, all but extirpated indeed, only some six hundred men being left, and they hiding themselves in the rock Rimmon—the impregnable Rock of the Pomegranate—some four months, thinking of the eighteen thousand men of valour who had been "trodden down with ease over against Gibeah toward the sunrising." But there was a time of heart-breaking in Israel. In the battlefield men thought only of victory, but they went up unto what is called in the text "the house of God." That is the right point of observation. Until you have looked at your fellow creatures from the house of God, from the altar, from the cross, you have never looked at them. Israel was now in the house of God, and began to reckon, to say, Who is here? Who is not here? Then they sighed, and shed tears, as only strong men can shed them, and in their tears they said, "O Lord God of Israel, why is this come to pass in Israel, that there should be to day one tribe lacking in Israel?" Thus men come to their better selves; heat dies away, vengeance halts in its desperate pursuit, all deepest and truest instincts come to the support of reason, natural affection stands by the side of justice, and great questions are quieted by great answers.

Does not the text exhibit the human aspect of the solicitude of God's own heart? In this respect, as well as in other ways, is not man made a little lower than God? In all such emotion there are suggestions infinite in scope and tenderness—suggestions of unity, family completeness, absolute unselfishness, redemption, forgiveness, reconstruction, everlasting joy! There is of course a sentiment which is without value, but this must not blind us to the fact that there is also an emotion without which we cannot sound the depths of God's own love. When we feel most truly, we often see most clearly. "Where art thou?" was the inquiry of God when Adam did not come towards him in the fearless joy of innocence. "Where is thy brother?" was the divine inquiry when Cain was found in criminal loneliness. Rather than Israel should be lost Moses would be blotted out of God's book. Christ came to seek and to save the lost. And Paul—that marvellous compound of Moses and Christ—honouring the majesty of the law, yet feeling its weakness in the presence of sin—did he not tremble under the same emotion? The answer will be found in the most doctrinal and logical, yet the most profoundly emotional of all his Epistles. In the Epistle to the Romans not only is one tribe threatened with extinction, but all Israel seems to be lost. The writer cannot rest, therefore. He has "great heaviness and continual sorrow in his heart." It is not enough for him that the forces of the Gentiles are moving towards the Cross, that from Midian, and Ephah, and Sheba men are arising to show forth the praises of the Lord; nor is it enough that the flocks of Kedar and the rams of Nebaioth shall be acceptable sacrifices: all this is good, beautiful, and an exceeding delight, but—but Israel is, not in the number of those who rejoice, Israel is hard of heart, and remembering this Paul says, "I could wish that myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh." "My heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." It was a sublime emotion. But who is the speaker? Take his own account of himself—"Of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin"—the very tribe which in the text is lacking! Thus history rolls round in amplified and ennobled repetition. In the Book of Judges all Israel mourned that Benjamin was lacking, and in the Epistle to the Romans, Benjamin, in the person of its most

illustrious descendant, laments that all Israel is away—far off in the wilderness of unbelief—he an alien who ought to have been a prince in the house of God.

Nor does the evidence of the presence of this emotion in the Bible end here. In the Apocalypse there is One—"faithful and true Witness, the beginning of the creation of God," and he says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock : if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in ;" the same who said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not !" the same who went after the lost sheep of the house of Israel ; the same who said, "Preach the Gospel to every creature," for good news must evermore do good.

There is, then, what may be called a distinct unity of emotion, call it pity, solicitude, compassion, or by any equal term, throughout the whole Bible. The Bible varies a good deal in historical and even in moral colour, but it never varies in pity, and love, and mercy. From the *first*, God loved man, even with atoning and redeeming love. Marvellous, truly and instructively, is the development of Biblical history. It changes page by page—now barbarous, now gentle, here an altar, there a commandment, yonder a ritual, and afar off an experience full of confusion, and riot, and tragedy : but in all the infinite tumult God looks after the wanderer with longing love, pursues him, pleads with him, says "Turn ye, turn ye, why will ye die ?" importunes him : "Cries,—How shall I give thee up ? Lets the lifted thunder drop." Even divine righteousness varies its aspects without varying its nature ; in some sense it measures its demands by human weakness : now it is an order for a place or a time ; then it is a series of initial and suggestive commandments ; then it is an accommodation to hardness of heart,—never losing a ray of its eternal glory, it yet creates an atmosphere suited to the vision of the beholder ;—but love, pity, mercy, care for the absent, wonder about the one lacking tribe,—this begins the book, ends the book, stirs the book like the throb of an infinite heart.

The love of God, the mercy, the pity, the compassion of God is not a revelation of the New Testament only, it is the revelation of the whole Bible. In Eden there was a Promised Seed ; in the wilderness there was a mercy-seat ; in Genesis there is a covenant ; in Malachi there is a book of remembrance ; in Exodus the Lord keeps mercy for thousands, and forgives iniquity, and transgression, and sin ; in Numbers "the Lord is longsuffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression ;" in Judges "the Lord was grieved for the misery of Israel ;" in Samuel he recalled the avenging angel ; in Chronicles (a book of annals) he says, if his people will seek his face and turn from their wicked ways, he will hear them from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and heal their land ; the Psalms are songs of forgiveness ; Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel are books glowing with the love of God ; and Daniel says, "To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against him ;" in Hosea, God heals the backsliding of his people, and loves them freely ; even Joel—that burning furnace—says that God is gracious and merciful ; Jonah, in solemn anger, says he knew that God was "a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness ;" and all the minor prophets praise the tenderness of God. So we find that this pity, compassion, mercy—by whatever name we call the emotion—is present from the beginning to the end of the Old Testament. Paul was the most Old Testament writer in all the New Testament. When he speaks of God being rich in mercy, good, forbearing, longsuffering, Paul is in very deed a Hebrew of the Hebrews, of the tribe of Benjamin. When the Jews at Jerusalem heard that Paul spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue they kept the more silence. We ought to do the same ; for we have understood that Paul was the Apostle of the Gentiles, that his place was far off among the heathen, that special grace was given unto him that he should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and at the very time he was preaching in Syria and Cilicia he was unknown by face unto the Churches of Judea which were in Christ. Yet this man, consecrated to preach in Gentile tongues, spake in the Hebrew tongue. Why ? He missed his own people. He thought that the mother-tongue might fetch some of them. His heart was

ill at ease. But was not the Hebrew tongue doubly dear to Paul? Surely. For when he, as Saul, was fallen to the earth as he went to Damascus, he heard a voice speaking to him "in the Hebrew tongue, saying, . . . I am Jesus." So it was the mother-tongue of his Christian life. It suited the great gospel better than any other language: what other could speak with such unction of "blood"? Any other tongue would make it vulgar—a measurable thing: but in the Hebrew it was lifted up into symbolism and grandeur. "Sacrifice," "redemption," "propitiation," "pardon,"—why, how could he speak in any other than the Hebrew tongue? Thus the Apostle of the Gentiles is also the Apostle of the Jews: the foreign missionary is the home missionary, and the home missionary is the foreign missionary, for it was the whole world that God thought of when he freely delivered up his Son for us all. Paul knew nothing of an Israel reduced to eleven tribes; speaking to Agrippa, he said, with a wonderfully suppressed pathos, "Our twelve tribes"; Paul knew nothing of a broken household, he knew only of the whole family in heaven and on earth: Paul knew nothing of an exclusive gospel; when he witnessed he witnessed "both to small and great." And James—a mind without poetry, a church without a spire—wrote his letter to the full number of the tribes, "The twelve tribes," said he—still twelve, though "scattered abroad."

Is it possible for a tribe to be "lacking" for ever? To become extinct? To lose its election and be damned? Where, for example, is the tribe of Dan? It disappears from the record in 1 Chronicles, and it is not counted in the Apocalypse. Were its few faithful members amalgamated with some other tribe, say this very tribe of Benjamin? Yet even in the Apocalypse, the number of the tribes is twelve. God's promise shall stand sure and steadfast, and his supper chamber shall be filled with guests! We may be unfaithful, and may lose our place, but the Blessed One who died for us shall see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied!

From another point of view we shall see that this yearning over the lacking tribe was no mere sentiment. This high feeling had also a disciplinary aspect, and was, therefore, a whole

feeling—a complete and ardent loyalty. When Deborah sang her triumphal song she disclosed the second and sterner aspect of this emotion. She knew who was lacking from the war against Jabin King of Hazor, and did not scruple to mention by name the guilty absentees. Why should there have been, said that mother heart, one tribe lacking on that day of war? Reuben remained among the sheepfolds, and listened to the bleatings of the flocks, when he ought to have answered the call of the battle horn and repulsed the chariots of Sisera; and Deborah named him: “For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart; for the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.” Why was he lacking that day? He sent promises, but remained at home. He was busy amongst the flocks when he ought to have been suffering with the army! Oh, these prior engagements! these other occupations! these domestic excuses! They went for nothing in the tempest of Deborah’s enthusiasm, and they ought to stand for nothing in our consuming zeal for the honour of our Lord and the dominion of his cross. Nor was Reuben the only absentee. Gilead abode beyond Jordan, Dan was concealed in ships, and Asher—are we not ashamed to say it?—peeped in cowardly curiosity from behind the creeks, and wondered how the war was going on. Yet the battle was won. No credit to the absentees. Where men failed women succeeded: whilst “Zebulun and Naphtali jeopardied their lives unto the death in the high places of the field,” Deborah and Jael made their names great in Israel. You may keep away from the war, but the battle will end in victory.

There is another variety of the principle of the text which cannot be wisely overlooked. There is a lacking or absence which affects great indignation because it has not been observed. Men stand back for a space that they may see whether they will be missed. Others come in after the victory and demand to know why they were not allowed to share in the fight! Let history be our proof. We stand or fall by facts in an argument like this. When Gideon overthrew the Midianites, and held in one hand the head of Prince Oreb, and in the other the head of Prince Zeeb, the Ephraimites chided him sharply because they had not been sent for. This was a trick of Ephraim—a trick he

dearly paid for when he tried it upon Jephthah. "Wherefore," said Ephraim to Jephthah, "passedst thou over to fight against the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee?" Jephthah told them why. He reminded them that once he did send for them and they did not come, and now that they began to chide him the Spirit of the Lord and of true judgment burned in him, and that day he choked the passages of the Jordan with forty-two thousand Ephraimites. Ephraim was a coward. Ephraim is a branded name. For ever will it be said of him, "Ephraim being armed and carrying bows turned back in the day of battle." Ephraim was famous for archery. Ephraim might have done wonders with bow and arrow, but he turned back, and then blamed others because he was not sent for! Is it so with any who may smile at Ephraim's cowardice? Are there not those who would have done wonderful things if they had known of the opportunity? They knew not when Christ was an hungered, or athirst, or naked, or sick, or in prison, or they would have given unto him: they say so, but—"These shall go away into everlasting punishment."

So the text taken in all its aspects is no mere sentiment. In presence of some gaps in the line of Israel the tears of the text become sparks of fire, because of the treachery of some and the cowardice of others. We have forgotten that Christianity is a battle as well as a gospel. Is the whole fighting strength of the Church under discipline? Are any skulking at home? Are any enjoying the delights of civilisation who ought to be in the wilderness of heathenism; nay, come closer still; are any sitting in luxury and idleness who ought to be in some department of Christian service—say in the Sunday-school, in the diaconate, in districts inhabited by poverty and ignorance? Why should there be this day one tribe lacking in Christian Israel? There is a tremendous foe. We are all needed. There is room for all—for wealth, for genius, for learning, for love, for age, for youth. Come! Surrender yourselves to Christ! Be soldiers of the Cross!

"Sound, sound the clarion, shrill the fife;
To all the sensual world proclaim,
One crowded hour of glorious life
Is worth an age without a name."

But here a word of consolation may be fitly given. Some are no longer in the hot battle, yet they must not be thought of as absent or lacking from the household of God. Even the mighty David "waxed faint." He was but seventy when he died. Yet when we say "but seventy" do we not speak carelessly? What a seventy! what years they were! When he tottered under his weakness, in one of the closing battles, he nearly fell. A Philistine, Ishbibenob by name, had a new sword, and he was heavy upon the king, for the king was no longer what he used to be. The Philistine pressed hard upon him—upon him who slew the lion and the bear and the giant of Gath—upon him who made Jerusalem rich with the golden shields of Hadadezer. But he was getting old; he was but poor at last in the stroke of the sword; then came his loyal captains and said, so sweetly, with heart-breaking pathos, "Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel." David had fought enough; the shades of eventide were gathering around him; he had been a great warrior, but it was time he retired from the field. May not this also be the experience of many? After a long fight they stand aside, but, blessed be God, they are not "lacking." They have retired from the pastorate, from the public office, from the battlefield generally, but we do not mourn over them as Deborah mourned over Reuben and Gilead and Dan and Asher. They are not willingly absent. The old feeling again stirs in them. They sometimes think they could go back and fight just as well and as successfully as ever, and could preach just as richly and effectively and reverently as they ever did. They are not in the battlefield, but they are not lacking from the hosts of God; the light of their example abides, and their remembered service is a perpetual and gracious inspiration.

The text is full of tender feeling, showing itself in anxiety about the absent, though the absent one was both insignificant and ill-behaved. This anxiety is, we know, the very spirit of the whole Bible. It is the Spirit of Christ. It is the explanation of the cross. Remembering all this, we venture to say that this feeling—this feeling of profound and anxious emotion—*alone* can sustain constantly and worthily all Christian and

missionary service. When we lose this sacred feeling we lose our inspiration. When we cease to care for others, to long for the absent, to yearn over the poor and the out-of-the-way, our Christianity can live no longer. All Christian funds will languish when Christian feeling dies. Let us speak to ourselves plainly upon this matter. Many professing Christians are learned, controversial, orthodox in words, and idolaters of propriety: but where is the feeling which cannot rest until the lacking tribe is brought back? The preacher may do more by his tears than by mere dry reasoning. Only love, like God's, like Christ's, can persist in unselfish service—observe, *persist*, keep on, press forward, forgive injuries, forget neglects, begin again, stand at the door and knock, never give up, keep the door ajar for the prodigal, set a candle in the window for the wanderer,—only love can do these miracles: the mother can watch longer than the doctor: the shepherd will endure better than the hireling: pity will spare where law will destroy. What is it that is troubled on every side yet not distressed, perplexed yet not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken, cast down but not destroyed? What is it? It is the faith that works by love! Why continue in the ministry and prove it in much patience, in afflictions, in distress, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in fastings—why? “The love of Christ constraineth us.” *That* is the eternal motive, or the motive which alone can endure to eternity. Macaulay has well reminded us of Lord Bacon's just observation that mere negation, mere epicurean infidelity, has never disturbed the peace of the world. “It furnishes,” says he, “no motive for action. It has no missionaries, no crusaders, no martyrs.” When Christian institutions lose their feeling they become but useless and costly machines.

But, it may be urged, the feeling of the text was a feeling expressive of kinship, a family feeling, an *esprit de corps*. What argument can be built upon a domestic or tribal instinct? The question is out of place. Happily the answer is ready. The Christian conception of human nature is that it is *one*. “God hath made of one blood all nations of men to dwell on the face of the earth.” The question of Malachi, “Have we not all one Father? hath not God created us?” we answer in the words of

Christ—"Our Father which art in heaven." There are supreme moments in human experience; they cannot be long-continued, but what a memory they leave behind!—moments when we realise the unity of the human race, saying, "There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him." Man is one: for God is one. A traveller in his book on tropical South Africa tells us of a tribe called the Damaras, who have no knowledge of arithmetic, enumeration, or numbers, as we understand them. He gives many amusing instances illustrative of this lack of what may be called numerical knowledge. But amidst all he says, "how does the herdsman know when an ox is missing, when he looks upon the herd under the shadows of evening? He knows not because the number is less, but because of a face which he misses." Oh, that shepherdly look! The man says, "There is one lacking." Then the face is painted before the eye of his imagination. We are not numbers in an hostelry; we are not figures in an arithmetical series; we are faces, lives, souls, spirits, sons of God. What wonder if sometimes even in heaven the question should be asked, Why is there one face missing? Why is David's place empty?

We now reach the final and most pathetic point, namely, that there may be some who are saying in their hearts, not being able to say it aloud because of grief, Why is my child lacking from the Church? Why is my son not by my side at holy Sacrament? Why has my firstborn left his old father's faith and gone away? Oh, why? Be encouraged. He may return. He may come back to-day or to-morrow. Never give up your prayer. It is very hard to pray again after praying for years, and to mention a name that never seems to get into heaven; and the poor old heart gives way and says, "I cannot pray any longer about this: I am killed by the prodigal's very name: I will cease." Never! Hold on! After the next prayer there may be a sign in heaven—very small, but still a sign and a beginning. Sorrow may bring back the wanderer. God's veiled angel called Affliction may some night knock at the door and say, "I have brought back that which was lost." Great commercial distress may do it; an utter annihilation of the young man's

foolish ambitions may do it. God hath many ministers. His chariots are twenty thousand, and who shall say in which he will go forth, in the morning, at midday, or in the evening? Hope on then. One more prayer—the greatest, the best, the fullest of heart—almost an atonement, going nigh to the shedding of sacrificial blood. Do not despair. It may be that even yet you shall have the joy of completeness :—

“When, soon or late, you reach that coast,
O'er life's rough ocean driven,
You may rejoice, no wanderer lost,
A family in heaven.”

“HANDFULS OF PURPOSE,”

FOR ALL GLEANERS.

“*The children of Israel asked the Lord.*”
—JUDG. i. 1.

Notice the simplicity of this.—The conscious nearness of God.—The very easiest form of worship.—No enlargement of this form has been given even in Christianity, whose exhortation is, “Ask, and it shall be given you.”—Speaking to God elevates the soul.—Communion with God compels the spirit to search out acceptable words.—Such asking is really part of spiritual education.—The soul is called upon to recount its needs, and to set them in order before God.—The impossibility of imposing upon the Omniscient.—The suppliant must not do more than ask; that is to say, he must not make the answer a condition of his piety, or a standard by which he will judge the reality of the divine existence, and the goodness of the divine government.—All we can do is to put our case before God, and to plead it, and then the answer must be absolutely left with him.—We are to ask about everything.—We shall undervalue the sacredness of life if we suppose that some things are not worth asking about.—The life is equally sacred at all points when it is hidden in God. Nothing unimportant can ever arise in human life.—Spiritual wisdom is shown in making every point of consequence and needing the direct intervention and blessing of

God.—The word “children,” as descriptive of Israel, comes suggestively before this act of asking.—Are we not all the children of the living God? What have children to do but to ask?—not to dictate or demand, but simply to state in terms of supplication.—All such asking is to be done in the name of him who taught us how to pray.—God is still approached through priesthood, only now the priesthood is not human, but divine.—We should so cultivate communion with God that our prayer will be reduced to the simplicity of “asking.” The question is put as if from child to parent, or from friend to friend, or from scholar to teacher; all traces of formality, ceremony, servility are absent, and the communion is marked by frankness, directness, and childlike simplicity.—This is the true genius of prayer.

“*And when the Lord raised them up judges, then the Lord was with the judge.*”—JUDG. ii. 18.

A picture of society when divinely constructed.—The economy of mediation is here, as everywhere, observed.—The great principle of election is here also affirmed.—The judges were raised up by the Lord.—Men did not make themselves judges, nor did the people arbitrarily appoint and dismiss

the judges. — The appointment was divine. — So it ought to be considered in all magistracy, judgeship, and government. — Society is a piece of mosaic wrought out by the loving hands of God. — God will only speak through the judges whom he himself has created and appointed. — The judge should recognise this himself, and be modest and self-restrained in proportion. — The true leader is always himself a follower of the divine guidance. — Elevation to office does not mean release from responsibility, but rather a responsibility that is enlarged and sanctified. — In times of national crisis men should pray that God would send the right leaders into the land, and clothe those leaders with appropriate influence. — It is in vain to have an orthodox Church and an atheistic State — that is to say, that the Church may be guided by God, but that the State may attempt to govern itself. — The Church should continually pray for the State, and thus acknowledge that God is the God of nations as well as the God of churches. — It is marvellous to observe how throughout the whole Scripture, all great appointments are acknowledged to be in the hands of God. — The children of Israel cried unto the Lord, and Moses was sent ; again they cried, and judges were raised up ; and so throughout the whole historical line, until Jesus Christ says, "Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest." — This is a lesson quite as much to those who suppose themselves to be appointed to high authority, as for the peoples whom they rule or attempt to direct. — The true judge, minister, leader, statesman, will recognise that he is divinely appointed, and therefore accountable to God. — This will give moderation to his counsels, and invest all his thoughts and purposes with supreme solemnity, and will subdue the pomp of office by

the consciousness of personal obligation to God.

"And they were to prove Israel by them, to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the Lord, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses."

—JUDG. iii. 4.

This may show us the part which our enemies have to play in the education and development of our lives. — The Lord left so many nations, as the Canaanites, the Zidonians, and the Hivites, that they might subject Israel to continual testing to prove their quality. — It is so that hardships are permitted to continue in the life. — When we ask why we should be surrounded by limitations so exact, and even by opponents so hostile, we should remember that this was the plan which God pursued in the training of his ancient people. — This is the divine purpose of all human affliction. — God must be left to determine what tests are best for our quality. — Men are not to choose their own tests and standards, but are to accept the chastening of the Lord, and to go into the furnace which the Almighty has specifically appointed. — Different men are tried in different ways, but the object of the trial is the same. — Your business perplexities are sent to prove your honesty ; your bodily afflictions are imposed to test your courage and trust ; your family difficulties are allowed to continue that the life of the household may be strengthened and refined ; your bitterest rival is permitted to run his course side by side with you that your temper may be sweetened, your charity enlarged, and your whole tone of mind elevated. — Thus we are brought to consider the religious uses of opposition and hardships, and to identify their very presence with the distinct purpose of God. —

When we can take this view of them we shall use them rather than fear them, and in due time shall come to account them as in some sort friends and teachers.—“My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord.”

—*“A mother in Israel.”*—JUDG. v. 7.

We need the womanly element in the Church.—The mother is the soul of the family.—We cannot live upon hard law and severe discipline; there must always be a tender element in our education, for we are weak, and need the ministry of compassion and love.—We speak much about the fathers of the Church, and the fathers of the nation, and are apt to forget that the “mothers in Israel” have often been more heroic than the fathers, and that their very gentleness has become their strength in time of danger.—Whilst discouraging some aspects of what are termed sisterhoods, and whilst deprecating what is known as the worship of the Virgin Mother, we should seek for the truth which underlies all this womanly ministry.—Many could serve the Church by miracles of love, patience, compassion, and encouragement, whose voice could never be heard on public questions.—Every woman can at least be “a mother in Israel” within the limits of her own family.—She is not called upon to be a theologian, a scholar, a pedant, a source of alarm to the ignorant and the incompetent, but she is called upon to be compassionate, sympathetic, and encouraging.—It is a mistake to suppose that the Church is either a drill-ground or a school alone.—It is a house, a home, a nursery; it is a place of healing, education, and comfort; many a strong man would be the better if to all his strength he added a touch of tenderness.—Beautiful is the service of mothers in the Church of Christ.—They can speak with an in-

fluence all their own, absolutely indisputable, even by the most learned and eloquent men.—They know how to whisper to sorrow, how to touch weakness without burdening it, how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.—All womanly influence in the Church and in the family should be abundantly and gratefully encouraged.

—*“There were great searchings of heart.”*
—JUDG. v. 16.

These searchings are always wanted.—We gain in solidity by such scrutiny.—It is impossible to live long and satisfactorily upon mere appearances, or upon vain hopes that all will turn out right at the last.—There is a great lack of heart-work in the Church and in the individual.—We are to search into causes of absence from the field of danger, of abatement of zeal and enthusiasm, and of every form of unbelief.—The great court of inquiry is the heart rather than the intellect.—We can never get at foundations and realities until we have pierced the region of motive, the region of secret and unconfessed purpose.—We should judge others less than we judge ourselves.—Let every man put to himself the penetrating question, What have I done, or what have I left undone; and why is the case so, either on the one side or the other?—Let there be no fault-finding with other people; let there be no self-sparing.—Force the question to its uttermost extent, and be severer with yourself than with other men.—All this may mean bitterness, pain, disappointment, and shame, but in the long run it will mean healing, inspiration, strength, and renewed encouragement. “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.”—If we say we have no sin, we are liars.—Our sins are transgressions of the heart, and until the heart itself is cleansed the hands

never can be pure.—Let every man examine himself.—Let every man hold the candle of the Lord over the secrets of his heart.

"Faint, yet pursuing."—JUDG. viii. 4.

A description of many a Christian heart.—We shall be judged, not by the faintness, but by the pursuit.—Not what the heart does, but what the heart would do, will be God's question.—Sometimes we are so faint that we can only look in the right direction, but the direction being right, the look shall be regarded as equal to pursuit.—There is a moral meaning in attitudes.—Endeavours are often construed into actions.—He who would give a cup of cold water to a disciple if he could, will be accounted as having done it.—Men will be judged by what has been in their hearts; then the first will be last, and the last will be first.—Allowance is made for faintness, for there is only One that fainteth not, neither is weary.—God knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.—Men must not be too deeply discouraged because of their faintness, but must often look upon it as part of their very mortality.—Even the apostle said the flesh was weak when the spirit was willing; but he knew that God would judge by the spirit, and not by the flesh.—At the same time we must be severe in our judgment upon ourselves, lest we suppose that a pleasant dream, which imposes no sacrifice, should be enough as proof of our Christian fidelity.—We must not assume faintness by easily giving way to discouragement.—Against some faintness we can bravely struggle, and our very struggling may overcome it.—Indolence must not be mistaken for this faintness.—Selfish calculation must not be allowed to take its place.—We must be true to ourselves in all these matters, or we cannot realise the blessing that is promised.—When a man

tells lies to himself about his faintness, he will soon relinquish his pursuit.—We can whisper where we cannot speak aloud.—We may be able to hold out a hand when we cannot utter a tone.—We can put large meaning into looks and postures.—There is no mistaking an earnest man. Even his feebleness may be so used as to become an element of spiritual strength.

"But the youth drew not his sword: for he feared, because he was yet a youth."—JUDG. viii. 20.

Too much must not be expected from youth.—It was a hard thing that Jether was here asked to do.—We may discourage youth by expecting too much from it at once.—It is well for that youth who understands the limits of his strength, and keeps well within them.—There is an audacity which it is hard to distinguish from impiety.—By imposing too heavy responsibilities upon youth, we may either inflame its vanity or discourage its modesty.—Every man is to consider what he can do, with propriety, and not to force himself to the front, unless others have proved unworthy of the occasion.—Under other circumstances youth is called upon to do the very hardest work. When that is the case, the revelation of duty will be made clear.—It was David who was called upon to slay Goliath.—David said, "Is there not a cause?" He was the subject of an inspiration unknown to others; he was obeying a voice which others could not hear.—It is easy to rebuke youth for not doing certain things from which young modesty shrinks; it is better to recognise the modesty than to magnify the fear.—Young people do not become accustomed to the sword all at once. For a time they must be kept at home, watching the "few sheep in the wilderness," or planting a few flowers in the domestic

garden ; by-and-by they may grow up to be soldiers and valiant men.—In the meantime, let us not condemn the Jethers of the age when they hesitate to shed blood.

"Thou seest the shadow of the mountains as if they were men."—JUDG. ix. 36.

This text may be used as showing how possible it is to be magnifying dangers, or creating illusory enemies.—Whilst this is historically true, it is spiritually indisputable.—There is a tendency in the spiritual life to magnify all difficulties, and so to discourage the soul.—Who has not been frightened by shadows? Who has not shrunk from the conclusions of his own just reasoning?—The hill always looks to be highest when viewed from a distance.—When approached it subsides and becomes really easy of ascent.—We may turn some men into enemies by looking upon them from a great distance, or seeing them under unfavourable circumstances.—We must come near them, and estimate them at their proper strength.—Approach is sometimes the best solution of difficulties.—Boldness often dissolves the mystery which it has feared.—The Christian should set it down as an article of his faith that they can be only shadows which are arrayed against the Lord and against his anointed.—Even Pharaoh, king of Egypt, was "but a noise."—The mightiest men who set themselves against Christ are not so much men as shadows.—All this has been proved again and again in history, and the proof should be taken as an inspiration and an encouragement by the age now living and by all the ages to come.—All clever arguments, all elaborated scepticisms, all new heterodoxies are but so many shadows, and are on no account to be feared by the soldiers of Christ.—Remember that shadows are

not to be destroyed by swords and guns, or by violence of any kind ; the shadows can only be chased away by light : "Ye are the light of the world."—If we were more radiant we should see fewer shadows, or the shadows would flee away before the approaching glory.—Pray for an increase of luminousness, that the whole character may be as a sun, shining in his strength, and dissolving and dispersing every shadow.

"What ye have seen me do, make haste, and do as I have done."—JUDG. ix. 48.

This exhortation may be adopted by Christian believers.—What ye have seen me do in difficult business circumstances.—What ye have seen me do in the presence of great temptations.—What ye have seen me do in the way of self-sacrifice.—What ye have seen me do in great afflictions.—This may be adopted also by Christian teachers.—The Apostle Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."—What ye have seen me do in the way of energy, in the way of faith, in the way of self-expenditure, in the way of forgiveness, make haste, and do as I have done.—Is the Christian believer prepared to make himself an example to others? What Christian man would be willing to say, You need not at present look any further than to myself, for I am guide and standard enough to the Church?—This exhortation may also be adopted by parents when addressing their children : each father or mother should be able to say, What ye have seen me do in the thick of domestic difficulties, in the night of pain, in the assured oncoming of poverty, in the very cloud and overshadowing of despair.—If we were to accustom ourselves to the thought that we have to show forth our own conduct as a standard, it would make us more

careful to see that that standard is noble and right.—Even if we do not call attention to our actions ourselves, yet men are looking on, and may well claim that they have a right to copy us.—We may affect humility, and say, Do not look at us, but look at our Master; but after all the men of the world have a right to say, No: Christ is too high for us: we will look at his followers, and judge his Christianity by their spirit and their action.—A point, too, might be made of the words "make haste," because that which is an example to-day may be no example to-morrow, in relation to certain practical matters; the circumstances altering, the adaptation to them must alter also. Beside, if we do not copy the example of to-day we may not be living to copy it to-morrow.—There are circumstances under which everything depends upon a prompt use of time.—The train goes at a certain moment, so does the post; the bank closes at a given hour: opportunities of all kinds are limited.—Hence the great importance which ought to be attached to the words "make haste."

"His soul was grieved for the misery of Israel."—JUDG. x. 16.

We must first have sympathy, then action.—Action based on sympathy is likely to be permanent and pure.—If we do not see the miseries of mankind we shall not be moved to preach the gospel of salvation or to do the necessary work of mercy.—He who denies the existence of poverty will not be likely to become liberal in his donations.—He who does not pity the wounded traveller will not be likely to dismount and attend to his wounds.—We have learning, genius, eloquence; but what about our grief for the miseries of the world?—Men who are moved by sympathy may have to listen to many a bitter tale, and may often have to be shut up in face-to-face

communion with scenes that shock and pain the heart.—Some men can only see the misery, and then relate it to others, and thus move them with their larger resources to go forth to its relief, or empower agents to represent them in the ministry of help.—The first thing we have to do is to consider the length and breadth of the case—the case of poverty, oppression, helplessness—and then our hearts having become affected by the presence and action of indisputable facts, we are to ask what can be done by way of remedy or redress.—
 "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth not he know it? and shall not he render to every man according to his works?"—
 We do not destroy the miseries of the world by shutting our eyes to them.—No man can be truly grieved for the miseries of the world without instantly attempting to mitigate them. He may fail in his attempt, but he will make it resolutely and self-sacrificingly.—If we are merely attempting to satisfy the fancies of the world, or gratify the whims of the world, we shall often fail in our service, and continually be disappointed with its results; but if we are fellow-workers with Christ in attempting to relieve the miseries of the world we shall find that the work is its own inspiration and its own reward.

"Why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?"—JUDG. xi. 7.

A proper inquiry to address to all applicants.—A rebuke is implied in the terms of the question.—The men had not come before. Up to this time they had disowned Jephthah; now in distress they wished to make use of him.

—Circumstances test friendships and the reality and unselfishness of appeals. —God is always exposed to this kind of prayer.—Why thus ill-treat and dishonour God in the very act, as we suppose, of recognising his existence and goodness?—God does not ask us why we have come to him, but why we have come to him in distress; the coming itself is right, but the time—namely, the time of distress—may give peculiar significance to our approach.—This is a great hold which God has upon the human race.—The time of distress comes in every life, and in that hour men ask the greatest questions, and are, as it were, forced into the exercise of prayer. —When pain seizes the body, or when difficulty perplexes the circumstances, when severe family affliction clouds the house, when death has sent its forecast into the heart of the family, then men may begin to cry out for the living God. —God interrogates us, as Jephthah interrogated the elders of Gilead.—Our answer must often be one of pitiful humiliation.—God does not intend to disown us or repel us by asking the question; his purpose is to make us acquainted with ourselves, and to show us how complex is the structure and action of human motives.—Selfishness cannot pray.—Selfishness can beg, implore, intreat, whine, and make tragical appeals; but selfishness cannot get near enough to God to commune with him, or in the true sense to ask a favour at his hands.—The prayers of the wicked are an abomination unto the Lord.—If the prayer of our selfishness is answered, it is not because it is a selfish prayer, but because of God's infinite graciousness.

"How shall we order the child, and how shall we do unto him?"—JUDG. xiii. 12.

The supreme question which parents should ask.—A question which God

permits to be put to himself.—God alone can know the true way of training a human life.—It is in vain to ask God's guidance after the foundations of the life have been laid and its policy has been determined upon. The child is to be trained up from its earliest moment.—There is a sense in which there is no time of unconsciousness to the child: we are making impressions even when those impressions are not accompanied by acts of intelligence.—Surely blessed is that child who has never seen anything in father or mother that is not true, beautiful, and good.—It would seem the easiest thing in the world to train a child; in reality it is the most difficult.—Every child has its own peculiar psychology.—Every child has its own peculiar motive, impulse, vision of things, and purpose.—The very wisdom of God is required in the right training of children.—But the child cannot be trained aright until the parent has a correct conception of life itself.—If life is a question of this world, of immediate health, wealth, and enjoyment, then the policy of child-training is easy and simple enough; but if life here is but the beginning of real life, if the present state of existence is but a gate opening upon true destinies and illimitable spheres of action, then light from above is needed, and guidance and comfort from the Father of all men.—Let parents be encouraged to consult God about child-training.—Let every child be the subject of special prayer.—Let the parent be able to say, should occasion arise, to each child, "I have prayed for thee," as Christ said to Simon Peter.

"Why askest thou thus after my name, seeing it is secret?"—JUDG. xiii. 18.

Men are continually driven back from secret altars, and forbidden to indulge

their curiosity in sacred places.—We may receive anonymous blessings.—It is difficult to distinguish sometimes between curiosity and reverent inquiry.—Sometimes we are more interested in the secret things than in the things revealed. When we are conscious of such interest we may know that we are animated by curiosity, and not by the spirit of reverential inquiry.—In coming to the Bible we must come for ripe fruit, for practical blessings ready to be handled, for the things which we can immediately understand and apply; and we must not be deterred from our use and enjoyment of these because a secret seems to be hidden within them all, and a ghostly presence seems to be moving in shadow across the pages as we peruse them.—There is a point at which the knowable ends: at that point we may either become fools or wise men—fools because we say there is nothing worth knowing, or wise men by saying the temporal must be conducted in the light of the eternal, the finite must be ennobled by a consciousness of the infinite, the human must be lifted up to its noblest significance by the assured presence and judgment of the divine.

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"And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him."—JUDG. xvi. 20.

This is the saddest of all mental experience.—It has its counterpart even in business and in professional life.—There are men of business who suppose they are as competent and energetic as ever, whilst those who are looking on observe how great is the decay, and how lamentable the weakness.—Men suppose themselves as capable as ever of giving advice in perplexity, yet when they come to counsel the bewildered mind they lose the centre of thought, and miss altogether the purpose which

the counsel was intended to serve.—We go away from such men filled with a sense of pity.—Let us apply the same truth to the religious nature.—Note the ghastliness of having a form of godliness without the power thereof.—No irony so distressing.—A man may use the very words of prayer, and yet may not enter into the spirit of fellowship with God.—The picture is that of a man on whose outward appearance no change has been wrought which he himself accounts of any consequence, but within the house of the soul has been stripped of all that was valuable, and is left in emptiness and desolation.—A terrible thing it is to bow down in prayer after God himself has forsaken the altar.—But is it possible for a man to have lost fellowship with God, and yet to be unaware of the loss? All history says that it is possible.—Familiarity with certain places and modes and actions may delude the mind into believing that whilst the usage is repeated the spirit is retained.—We grow into a species of self-idolatry sometimes without intention, and often without knowledge.—How are we to know that the Lord is still with us? Always by the simple test of obedience.—But is not obedience itself sometimes a delusive action? Possibly, and therefore we should esteem most highly that obedience which imposes upon us the pain and loss of sacrifice.—How does the Lord depart from a man?—The intellect is apparently as acute as ever, external offices are fulfilled as punctiliously as before, no blemish is found upon the public reputation,—how, then, can God have departed from the man?—The mystery lies in the fact of our composite nature: we are body and soul, flesh and spirit, in us there is both time and eternity, dust of the earth and fire from heaven; and, our life being so complex, we do not instantly know when the very centre of life and thought

has been changed—that is, we go on for a little while by a momentum originally received, but which has no power of self-replenishment, and therefore must die when the original inspiration is withdrawn.—Let us not make any religious experiments as Samson did.—He got into a mood of speculation and adventure, saying, If you do this or that, I shall be as other men.—He did not mean at first to tell his secret, but little by little we are led to the giving up of that which is the very mystery and glory of life.—It is infinitely dangerous to tamper with temptation.—There may be a kind of pleasure in taunting the Philistines, misleading them, mocking them, and laughing at them in their disasters, but he should be stronger than ever Samson was who ventures to play with the enemy, and to practise tricks and puzzles for the sake of bewildering and annoying them.—It is impossible to say when the last temptation may come, or how we ourselves may be tempted to try if in reality our strength lay where we supposed it to lie.—The lesson comes back again and again from all quarters, and with a thousand voices—“Watch and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.”

“*When Micah saw that they were too strong for him, he turned.*”—JUDG. xviii. 26.

Different estimates of strength.—Men are tested by circumstances.—If the pursuers had been fewer, Micah would have summoned up courage and acted differently.—He gave way, as men are now doing, to the force of numbers.—“Follow not a multitude to do evil.”—The lesson is repeated in the experience of many; as, for example, in the experience of the young man who explains his conduct by saying that all his companions are pressing in one direction, and that it would be folly for him to

attempt to resist them.—It applies also to the custom or fashion of the day.—Men say, As well be out of the world as be out of the fashion. When they see that the customs of society are too strong for them, they themselves turn, sophistically and foolishly arguing that it is in vain for one man to suppose that he can turn back the tide of public opinion or the flood of universally-established custom.—All history proves that solitary men have often been stronger than multitudes.—The only counting which we should permit ourselves to adopt is a reckoning as to the presence of God with us in our enterprises; assured that he goes forth with us, we have nothing to do with any other arithmetic.—Though an host should encamp against us, God will be our confidence, and will bring in our judgment and triumph.—Always ask on which side is God, on which side is Jesus Christ, on which side is conscience; and, having ascertained that side, there need be no further enumeration of forces.—The good man always says, and in saying it redoubles his courage, They that be for me are more than those that be against me.

“*Tell us how was this wickedness?*”—JUDG. xx. 3.

We should not shrink from scrutinising evil, and asking it piercing questions as to its origin and cause.—We cannot deal with wickedness until we have got at its roots.—Evil is not an accident which is found upon the surface, varying with the climate and the light; it is a disease of the heart, and only a heart-cure can utterly extirpate the evil and restore health to the whole man.—Men who cannot conduct a great philosophical inquiry as to the origin of evil may conduct a very searching scrutiny into their own questionable or wicked actions.—“How was this wickedness?”

Was it because of a desire to fulfil a selfish ambition?—Was it done in order to quench a fiery appetite?—Was it done suddenly, in a moment of madness, or after long consideration and ample preparation?—Was it one of the sudden blasts which seize the soul without notice?—Or did we roll the iniquity under our tongue as a sweet morsel and enjoy the wickedness long in advance?—Sometimes it will do the soul good to tell the tale of its wickedness to friendly inquirers.—There is a sense in which confession even by man to man may do the soul great good.—The confession must not be made in any sacerdotal sense, as if man had power to forgive sin, but it must be told to force the soul itself into contrition, shame, self-renunciation, and to constitute a kind of judgment outside itself which it may

continually fear.—It is possible by this kind of confession to create a species of criticism on the part of others which may hold us in restraint in days to come.—The great thought is that we are not to cover up wickedness, or lessen it, or decorate it, or excuse it; we are to tell the plain and shameful tale straight out from end to end, that we may know how the disease is to be treated.—“If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins.” “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts.” The Gospel tells us that there is a Man who receiveth sinners. His name is Jesus Christ. No man ever came to him with broken-hearted desire to repent of his sin and abandon it who was turned away with one word or look of discouragement.

THE BOOK OF RUTH.

RUTH and Esther no Bible reader could well spare from the sacred volume, nor could we do without the Song of Solomon, which also supplies a feminine element which softens and chastens a volume so full of judgment and thunder, sovereignty and grandeur. A great famine broke out in the days "when the Judges judged." So father, mother, and two sons migrated from Bethlehem to the land of Moab, where the two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, took two Moabitesses, Ruth and Orpah, to wife. After ten years' sojourn, Naomi, the mother, returned to Judah, leaving behind her Elimelech her husband and her two sons, all of whom had died in the strange land. The rest of the story is told in the brief book. A few useful notes may be cited from a mass of criticism, which will help the general reader better to understand the tale. Ruth was the great-grandmother of David, and probably lived one hundred years before him. In the genealogy given by Matthew, the father of Boaz is called Salmon, who was the husband of Rahab. Boaz is supposed to have been born not many years after the taking of Jericho. As to the authorship of the book, the Talmud says Samuel wrote as one book the Judges and Ruth. A most painstaking German critic supposes the book to have been written during the Babylonian captivity. It has been suggested that the Book of Ruth is given in the Bible on account of David, of whose lineage no mention is made in the books of Samuel. This may be so, but I cannot consider it enough. Criticism may easily err in assigning reasons for the composition of the Bible. Certainly we need such little stories to help us in our human life and to show us how true it is that the Bible is a human Book, dealing with things that we can see

and test ourselves, and not only with transcendent speculations which lie beyond the line of reverent reason. The Bible might easily have been too grand. Even Isaiah, in whose radiant pages prophecy seems to attain its supreme sublimity, must now and again come down from infinite heights to sing some sweet song adapted to human ears. The Book of Ruth shows that the Bible is the Book of the people, a family Book, a record of human life in all its moods, circumstances, passions, and volitions. Many can follow Ruth who cannot understand Ezekiel; as many can understand the parable of the Prodigal Son who cannot enter into the mystery of the Apocalypse. If we were to ask what right has a story like Ruth's to be in the Bible, we might properly reply, By the right of human nature, by the right of kinship to the universal human heart. We may make even our personal religion far too grand. We are surprised by the little things that are in the Bible, wondering why they should come to fill up so much space in a book which we think ought to have been filled with nothing but stupendous events. This is not the way of God in the ordering and direction of human life. All things are little to God, and all things are equally great to him. It is our ignorance that calls this little, and that great, this trivial, and that important. If not a sparrow falls to the ground without our Father, we may be sure that he regards all such little stories as that of Ruth and Esther as of great consequence to the completion of the whole tale of human history. This attempt at monotonous grandeur springs from a spirit of vanity. The men who would have written nothing but what is great and dazzling in the Bible are very likely to be men who think they are doing nothing in life unless they are working upon a heroic and stupendous scale. In quite another spirit does Jesus Christ lay down his doctrine and law. We are to attend to so-called little things, to the details of life, to gathering up the fragments, to make the most of our moments, and to turn every day into a school

for the accomplishment of some task that shall bear upon the final culture of manhood. We cannot always be doing great deeds. Nor can we always be living in a spirit of ecstasy. We must make room in the Christian life for quietness, patience, silent suffering, humble service. No one man is required to represent the whole Bible in his own experience. Some may be as the Book of Ruth or of Esther, others as the Song of Solomon ; some may be as glowing and brilliant as Isaiah and Ezekiel, while others must be content with being classified with the minor prophets : the great matter to be considered is that we all constitute God's volume of revelation, that every man has something to say to his age which no other man can say for him ; in this way we realise our unity, and express the purpose of God. The man who asks why should so little a book as Ruth be in the Bible may also ask why obscure lives are found in human history. Why should there be any simple annals of the poor ? Why should children be anything accounted of ? Why should other than great soldiers, leaders, statesmen, and patriots have a place in the human record ? God takes up little children and blesses them ; God gives women a special status in society ; God sets up and puts down according to his own sovereignty, and he looks upon the human family as one,—not as a series of units only, but as constituting one great idea of unity and development. It is true that there is one point of grandeur in Ruth ; so there may be in every human life. In attempting to account for the presence of Ruth in the Bible, this point of grandeur has, as we have said, been fixed upon. Let every man look for the point of supremacy in his own life. Even in the lowliest and weakest there are points of immeasurable importance. It is because we are men that we are permitted to live in a spirit of hope and faith. It is because we bear the image and likeness of God that we are sought by the Divine Shepherd, and that we are implored to return. To be a man is to be

great. To be human is to be almost divine. We are not to look for explanations of God's action in regard to us in any accidental greatness or importance, but in the fundamental and unchangeable quality of human nature itself. Some lives are mirror-like ; that is to say, they reflect the image of the reader. Few can read the whole story of Ruth without feeling that here and there her experience is common with the lot of humanity. No one reader may have lived the whole life of Ruth ; yet all may be able to join her at some particular point, in sorrow, in need, in the restoration of hope, and in the culmination of purest aspiration and desire. God avails himself of the dramatic mode of interpretation in order to reveal his inmost purpose. We can only understand some truths in proportion as they come to us in parable or figure, or imagined drama. For other interpretations we must look to human life itself in its most naked and repulsive realities. God cannot be understood by the monastic thinker who deals only with introspection and metaphysic : God is the God of history, of nations, of progress, and he is continually writing his Bible in the elaboration and culmination of events. We should pray for the eyes that see the signs of the times, and for the heart that understands the things that are being done on the right hand and on the left. Political history is a section of God's Bible. All art, science, and philosophy contribute pages to the revelation of God. Every little child's life, properly read and comprehended, will show some new aspect of the tender providence of Heaven. Blessed are they who have eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand, for the going forth of the Lord is from the rising of the sun to the setting of the same : in the winter he speaks in severity, in summer he addresses us in gentleness : in our filled barns he discourses to us of the Bread of Heaven ; and in all the way of life he has messages to deliver to us which enlarge the vision and comfort the heart. Under these convictions let us now proceed to read the sweet story of Ruth.

RUTH. (ANNOTATED.)

Chapter i.

1. Now [And,—an intro-copula which connects it with some other book] it came to pass in the days [a very early period in the days] when the judges ruled [judged], that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Beth-lehem-judah [Judah is added to distinguish it from the Bethlehem in the tribe of Zebulun] went to sojourn [to tarry as a stranger] in the country of Moab [exceptionally rich and fertile: see Isaiah xvi. and Jeremiah xxxviii., and often an asylum for the Israelites], he, and his wife, and his two sons.

2. And the name of the man was Elimelech ["my God is king";—probably, according to some Jewish doctors, a noble and powerful man], and the name of his wife Naomi ["to be pleasant," some say it means "ornament"], and the name of his two sons Mahlon ["sickness"] and Chilion ["wasting"], Ephrathites [Ephrah was the old name of Bethlehem] of Beth-lehem-judah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there [before and after this the Moabites had been conspicuously hard-hearted towards Israel].

3. And Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons.

4. And they took [always used in this connection in a bad sense] them wives [after the father's death] of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah ["kind"], and the name of the other Ruth ["comeliness"]: and they dwelled there about ten years.

5. And Mahlon and Chilion died [as young men] also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

6. Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard [Prov. xxv. 25] in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread.

7. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

8. And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother's house [a picture of unselfish love]: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me.

9. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her

husband [residence in a heathen land had not heathenised Naomi]. Then she kissed them ; and they lifted up their voice, and wept.

10. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

11. And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters : why will ye go with me ? Are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands ?

12. Turn again, my daughters, go your way ; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons ;

13. Would ye tarry for them till they were grown ? [“ Every Jew at this day is bound to marry before he is twenty years old, else he is looked upon as one that liveth in sin.”] Would ye stay for them from having husbands ? nay, my daughters ; for it grieveth me much for your sakes [it is far more bitter for me than for you], that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me.

14. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again : and Orpah kissed her mother in law ; but Ruth [the Rabbins say that Ruth was the daughter of Eglon king of Moab] clave [“ was glued,” would give the more literal meaning] unto her.

15. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods [local gods] : return thou after thy sister in law.

16. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God :

17. Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried : the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me.

18. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

19. ¶ So they two [types of the Jewish and Gentile Churches] went [the distance cannot have been less than fifty miles] until they came to Beth-lehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Beth-lehem, that all the city was moved [rang with the news] about them, and they [the women : the verb is feminine] said, Is this Naomi ?

20. And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara [“ bitter ”] : for the Almighty [a name almost peculiar to the Pentateuch and the Book of Job] hath dealt very bitterly with me.

21. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty : why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me [hath humbled me], and the Almighty hath afflicted me ?

22. So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her [“ so Jews and Gentiles walk to heaven together ”] which returned out of the country of Moab : and they came to Beth-lehem in the beginning of barley harvest [ordinarily falling about the end of April].

Chapter ii.

1. And Naomi had a kinsman of her husband's, a mighty man of wealth ["yet religious ; a rare bird"], of the family of Elimelech ; and his name was Boaz [fleetness—alacrity, or strength : a contrast to the name of her former husband].

2. And Ruth the Moabitess said unto Naomi, Let me now go to the field, and glean ears of corn after him in whose sight I shall find grace [not afraid of hard work]. And she said unto her, Go, my daughter.

3. And she went, and came, and gleaned in the field after the reapers : and her hap [literally, her hap happened] was to light on a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech.

4. And, behold, Boaz came from Beth-lehem, and said unto the reapers, The Lord be with you. And they answered him, The Lord bless thee [a beautiful picture of relations between the master and his servants].

5. Then said Boaz unto his servant that was set over the reapers, Whose damsel is this ?

6. And the servant that was set over the reapers answered and said, It is the [a] Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi out of the country of Moab [as a stranger Ruth had a special claim to the gleaning: see Levit. xix. 9, 10]:

7. And she said, I pray you, let me glean and gather after the reapers among the sheaves ["handfuls"] : so she came, and hath continued even from the morning until now, that she tarried a little in the house.

8. Then said Boaz unto Ruth, Hearest thou not, my daughter? [hinting at the seniority of Boaz] Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast ["cleave to"] by my maidens :

9. Let thine eyes be on the field that they do reap, and go thou after them : have I not charged the young men that they shall not touch thee ? and when thou art athirst, go unto the vessels, and drink of that which the young men have drawn [shall draw from time to time].

10. Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger ? [The Moabite language differed little from the Hebrew].

11. And Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband ; and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore [literally, yesterday and the day before].

12. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.

13. Then she said, Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord : for that thou

hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly [comfortably] unto thine handmaid, though I be not like unto one of thine handmaids.

14. And Boaz said unto her, At mealtime come thou hither, and eat of the bread, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar [wine which had become sour]. And she sat beside the reapers : and he reached her parched corn, and she did eat, and was sufficed, and left.

15. And when she was risen up to glean, Boaz commanded his young men, saying, Let her glean even among the sheaves, and reproach her not :

16. And let fall also some of the handfuls of purpose for her, and leave them, that she may glean them, and rebuke her not.

17. So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned : and it was about an ephah [four pecks] of barley.

18. And she took it up, and went into the city : and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned : and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.

19. And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day ? and where wroughtest thou ? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.

20. And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the Lord, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen [one of those who must redeem].

21. And Ruth the Moabite said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.

22. And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.

23. And so she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest ; and dwelt with her mother in law.

Chapter iii.

1. Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee, that it may be well with thee ?

2. And now is not Boaz of our kindred, with whose maidens thou wast ? Behold, he winnoweth barley [though a mighty man of wealth, still a workman] to night [for the sake of the breeze] in the threshingfloor.

3. Wash thyself therefore, and anoint thee, and, put thy raiment upon thee, and get thee down to the floor ; but make not thyself known unto the man, until he shall have done eating and drinking.

4. And it shall be, when he lieth down, that thou shalt mark the place

where he shall lie, and thou shalt go in, and uncover his feet, and lay thee down; and he will tell thee what thou shalt do.

5. And she said unto her, All that thou sayest unto me I will do.

6. And she went down unto the floor, and did according to all that her mother in law bade her.

7. And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry [not necessarily implying any excess: see Judges xix. 6, 9], he went to lie down at the end of the heap of corn: and she came softly, and uncovered his feet, and laid her down.

8. And it came to pass at midnight, that the man was afraid [Gen. xxvii. 33], and turned himself [bent himself]: and, behold, a woman lay at his feet.

9. And he said, Who art thou? And she answered, I am Ruth thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt ["wing"] over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman.

10. And he said, Blessed be thou of the Lord, my daughter [Origen compares Ruth to the Gentile church, the engrafted olive tree]: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followest not young men, whether poor or rich.

11. And now, my daughter, fear not; I will do to thee all that thou requirest: for all the city of my people doth know that thou art a virtuous woman.

12. And now it is true that I am thy near kinsman ["Goel"]: howbeit there is a kinsman [Goel] nearer than I.

13. Tarry this night, and it shall be in the morning, that if he will perform unto thee the part of a kinsman, well; let him do the kinsman's part: but if he will not do the part of a kinsman to thee, then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee, as the Lord liveth: lie down until the morning.

14. And she lay at his feet until the morning: and she rose up before one could know another. And he said, Let it not be known that a woman came into the floor [this is the narrator's paraphrase].

15. Also he said, Bring the vail ["mantle:" Isaiah iii. 22] that thou hast upon thee, and hold it. And when she held it, he measured six measures of barley [twice as much as she gleaned], and laid it on her: and she went into the city.

16. And when she came to her mother in law, she said, Who art thou, my daughter? [Rather, How hast thou fared?] And she told her all that the man had done to her.

17. And she said, These six measures of barley gave he me; for he said to me, Go not empty unto thy mother in law.

18. Then said she, Sit still, my daughter, until thou know how the matter will fall: for the man will not be in rest [will not keep quiet], until he have finished the thing this day.

Chapter iv.

1. Then went Boaz up [the town stood on a hill] to the gate, and sat him down there : and, behold, the kinsman [the Goel] of whom Boaz spake came by ; unto whom he said, Ho, such-a-one ! [the name of the kinsman was either unknown or purposely concealed] turn aside, sit down here. And he turned aside, and sat down.

2. And he took ten men of the elders of the city [every city was governed by elders], and said, Sit ye down here. And they sat down.

3. And he said unto the kinsman, Naomi, that is come again out of the country of Moab, selleth a parcel of land, which was our brother Elimelech's :

4. And I thought [literally, I said I will uncover thy ear] to advertise thee, saying, Buy it before the inhabitants, and before the elders of my people. If thou wilt redeem it, redeem it : but if thou wilt not redeem it, then tell me, that I may know : for there is none to redeem it beside thee ; and I am after thee. And he said, I will redeem it [not knowing the whole case].

5. Then said Boaz, What day thou buyest the field of the hand of Naomi, thou must buy it also of Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

6. ¶ And the kinsman said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I mar mine own inheritance : redeem thou my right to thyself [literally, redeem my redemption] ; for I cannot redeem it.

7. Now this was the manner in former time in Israel [showing that the custom was now obsolete] concerning redeeming, and concerning changing, for to confirm all things ; A man plucked off his shoe, and gave it to his neighbour : and this was a testimony in Israel :

8. Therefore the kinsman said unto Boaz, Buy it for thee. So he drew off his shoe [and so resigned the right of walking on the land as master].

9. ¶ And Boaz said unto the elders, and unto all the people, Ye are witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelech's, and all that was Chilion's and Mahlon's, of the hand of Naomi.

10. Moreover Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to be my wife, to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance, that the name of the dead be not cut off from among his brethren, and from the gate of his place : ye are witnesses this day.

11. And all the people that were in the gate, and the elders, said, We are witnesses. The Lord make the woman that is come into thine house like Rachel [her death and burial associated her with Beth-lehem] and like Leah, which two did build [from the Hebrew word *to build*, are derived the words for *son* and *daughter*] the house of Israel : and do thou worthily in Ephratah, and be famous in Beth-lehem :

12. And let thy house be like the house of Pharez [see Gen. xxxviii.], whom

Tamar bare unto Judah, of the seed which the Lord shall give thee of this young woman.

13. ¶ So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife : and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son.

14. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman [a Goel], that his name may be famous in Israel.

15. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age : for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.

16. And Naomi took the child, and laid it in her bosom, and became nurse unto it.

17. And the women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi ; and they called his name Obed [“serving”] : he is the father of Jesse, the father of David [the first mention of David in Scripture].

18. ¶ Now these are the generations of Pharez : Pharez begat Hezron,

19. And Hezron begat Ram, and Ram begat Amminadab,

20. And Amminadab begat Nahshon, and Nahshon begat Salmon,

21. And Salmon begat Boaz [in Matthew it is said that the mother of Boaz was Rahab], and Boaz begat Obed,

22. And Obed begat Jesse, and Jesse begat David. [“Some links of the chain have been dropped, and if so, then doubtless in the period before Boaz . . . We have here the distinguished names, others of less note being passed over.”]

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, the heavens and the earth are thine: they are the work of thine hand; they are the witnesses of thy power; they are unto us as a great wonder by day and by night. Behold, who can measure thy strength, or understand thy wisdom? Thou settest creation fast upon the pillars of thy strength, and none can overturn them. We rest in the security of almightiness. Our hope is in the living God. We have no fear: perfect love casteth out fear; and in so far as thou hast wrought that love in our hearts we are delivered from the slavery of fear. We rejoice in all the work of thy hand. All thy work is ever new: every morning is a creation, every night a benediction, and all the time thou art doing us good because of thy tender mercy and thy lovingkindness. We would love thee in Christ Jesus more and more. In him thou hast outdone all thy greatest works: he is the brightness of thy glory; he is the express image of thy person; he is the fairest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely; he is the bright and morning star; he is our sun and shield; he is our all in all. We bless thee, therefore, most of all for the revelation of thyself in thy Son Christ Jesus. How gracious his word! how gentle his speech! how tender his Spirit! how full of love altogether! He died, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God. Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our iniquities. This is our last and greatest joy: than this there is surely no greater gladness in heaven. Is not a Lamb, slain from the foundation of the world, seated upon heaven's own throne? and is not the anthem of heaven devoted to the praises of the Lamb? Bring us all nearer to Christ. May we feel more and more our need of him. May we answer his love by our faith; and, being sprinkled by his blood—yea, cleansed by it from every stain of sin—may we walk as those who are clothed in white, and keep our garments unspotted from the world. Thou hast set us in a strange place; thou hast caused us to pass under varied discipline: but thy rod is a rod of love, and it is in the hand of mercy. Help us to receive our daily task thankfully, resignedly, and to do it well in thy strength and love, knowing that God will judge us all, therefore may we not judge one another. We bless thee for all our hope, for all our secret gladness, for all the glory we have by faith seen beyond death and beyond the grave, so much so that we have mocked the monster and taunted him to his face, saying,—O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? Behold, we have triumphed in Christ, and because of his omnipotence we are delivered and are set in a great security. Help us to be wise men, truly knowing the times in which we live, fearlessly doing our duty, patiently awaiting God's verdict and the whole issue of providence. May there be in us no sign of terror, no sign of evil apprehen-

sion, but with stout hearts, and constant faith, and diligent industry may we do thy will on earth. Comfort those who are distressed ; dry the tears of anxious sorrow, intense and intolerable pain, and, above all, that secret and wordless misery which eats itself and which cannot draw upon the sympathy of those who observe it. The Lord direct us, protect us, be round about us—be our shield and safety, be our buckler and our defence ; then the battle shall be gladness, hard work shall be rest, and the eventide shall be a hint of that Sabbath all morning—the glad, glad day of heaven. Amen.

Ruth i. 1-18.

RUTH.

"She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight ;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament.

* * * * *

I saw her upon nearer view,
A spirit, yet a woman too ;
Her household motions light and free,
And steps of virgin liberty ;
A countenance in which did meet
Sweet records, promises as sweet ;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food."—*Wordsworth.*

"Think not the good,
The gentle deeds of mercy thou hast done,
Shall die forgotten all : the poor, the pris'ner,
The fatherless, the friendless, and the widow,
Who daily own the bounty of thine hand,
Shall cry to Heaven, and pull a blessing on thee."

The Preacher's Homiletical Commentary thus describes the scene of action:—

At first Bethlehem, then Moab, then Bethlehem and the regions around once again. Bethlehem, two short hours' journey south of Jerusalem. The most attractive and significant of all the world's birthplaces (Schubert). Under ordinary circumstances a fruitful land. Remarkably well watered in comparison with other parts of Palestine (Benjamin of Tudela). Even in the present state of Palestine, deserves its old name. Ritter says, "Notwithstanding poor cultivation, the soil is fruitful in olives, pomegranates, almonds, figs, and grapes." Hepworth Dixon thus describes its present appearance:—

"A string of gardens, a few steep fields, much crossing of white roads—so many that the point of junction may be called the Place of Paths—a glen which drops by leaps and steps to the great Cedron valley, makes the landscape. Yet the slope which is thus bound in by higher tops and more barren crests, has a winning beauty of its own, a joyous promise of bread and fruit, which puts it first among the chosen places of Judea. The old word Ephrath

meant Place of Fruit, the newer word Bethlehem meant House of Bread; one following the other, as barley and maize come after grapes and figs, and the sower of grain succeeds to the breeder of goats and kine. The little bit of plain through which Ruth gleaned after the young men, together with a level of stony ground here and there in the glen toward Mar Saba, are the only corn lands occurring in the hill country of Judea for many a league. . . . The lovely green ridge of Bethlehem is the scene of some of our most tender and gracious poems: the idylls of Rachel, of Ruth, of Saul, of David, of Channah, of Jeremiah, of the Virgin-mother; the subjects of these poems being the foremost passages in Israel's religious life."—*Dixon's Holy Land*.

Moab, on the other side, and S.E. of the Dead Sea, from Bethlehem. A district about forty miles long by twenty in width. In parts a luxuriant land when cultivated. The uplands are very fertile and productive (Professor Palmer). Now but scantily populated, but presenting evidences of former plenty and fertility.

RUTH'S ELECTION.

"THERE was a famine in the land" (v. 1). Necessity drives men forth, and is therefore to be regarded as a blessing rather than a curse. It is prosperity that may be looked upon, in some senses and under obvious limitations, as a danger, if not a malediction. "Necessity is the mother of invention." We owe nearly all we have to necessity: we owe next to nothing to prosperity. Why do men hasten to the city every morning, pouring in great living floods out of every railway terminus, and hastening away, scarcely speaking to one another, scarcely knowing one another? What is the explanation of this rush and tumult and speechless haste? Necessity—necessity of some kind, necessity real and proper, or something that is a mistaken necessity; still, *need* is the word of explanation and solution. Why are all those ships upon the sea, full of men, women, and little children? What is the meaning of this leaving of fatherland, this cutting asunder of tender and vital associations? Necessity. Men are going out to make lands, to create civilisations, to establish themselves in free, independent, secure, and happy life. Prosperity does not drive men out; prosperity keeps them at home. Hardship is the real blessing of life, when properly measured and properly received. All children should have "a hard time of it," under proper regulation. The children of this day are being ruined. They are being confectioned and

coddled to death. By the time they are fifteen years of age they have seen everything ; there is nothing more to be seen : they have travelled over the picture-galleries of Europe ; they have heard all the great speakers, musicians, and others ; they have seen all the great sights ;—they are over-powered with weariness. This should not be so : but it must continue to be so until parents see the reality of the case. Five years in the workhouse, the expenses being discharged by the parents, from five years of age to ten, would make men of the children. How they would then enjoy daisies, buttercups, little birds, half a day's rollicking freedom in the green meadow ! How pleased they would be with any occasional dainty found upon the table ! how doubly valuable the sweet kiss ! But we will not have it so. Hence, the children are brought up to be pests to themselves, and nuisances to the public. God however takes this matter into his own hands, and he graciously sends famine and need and difficulty, sickness and death, and a thousand black teachers down into his great public school, to show men the real charm of life, and to bring to bear upon them the most sacred and ennobling impulse which can inspire and sanctify their industry.

“There was a famine in the land.” There is always a famine. Not always a famine of bread and a thirst for water : that is the poorest of all famine ; the real famine is a famine of the heart—a famine of love, trust, sympathy, longing for help and not finding it, hoping and praying for sympathy and care, and the hope dying without an answer. Even that is not the worst famine of all :—“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord ;” there shall be no voice from heaven : the communication between the worlds shall be cut off, and men who would try to pray will have their prayers sent back as the only possible reply ; but even these days, properly received, may be turned to high advantage. Religion has now become a satiety. We can go to church so much that we hardly care to go at all. The gospel is preached to us in so many ways that we have become quite critical about them, and have “opinions” concerning them,—what hungry man asks metaphysical questions about the bread

that is set before him in the pangs of his necessity? Were there more conscious need there would be less criticism and infinitely greater enjoyment.

So the little story moves on. "And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons" (v. 1). And the husband died, and the two sons also departed this life. How is it the men die first? Surely, this is cruelty, from our point of view, that the men should thus have the best of it—that the men should be rid of the burden whilst they are quite young, and the women left to weep and wonder, and slave and suffer unspeakably, displaying a patience that might reverently be called divine. Why should not they have the best of life and go into heaven first, and be there to meet those who need more discipline—meet those to whom longer exposure in the bleak air would do good? But it is well.

"God keeps a niche
In heaven to hold our idols; and, albeit
He brake them to our faces and denied
That our close kisses should impair their white,
I know we shall behold them raised complete,
The dust swept from their beauty—glorified,
New Memnons singing in the great God-light."

Women can stand out better. There is more divinity in them. What could men do left alone upon the earth—clever men, able, skilful, inventive men? Why, they dare not turn round because of the great emptiness which bereavement has occasioned in their lives; their hearts go spark out, and their strength is like flowing water, and there is no constancy in their fortitude. A man left with four little children—say, is there a more helpless creature in all the world, a picture of drearier desolation, and a more ghastly spectacle of industrious thriftlessness? These things are all ordered in heaven: but surely it does seem cruel now and then that the men should die first and get away to the daylight, and the wealth of heaven's harvest-time, and all the gladness of eternal day, and leave their companions struggling far down in the world.

The two sons of the woman married, and they, as we have seen, also died, after dwelling in Moab about ten years; and this

was her position—a position of widowhood—three souls in heaven, three new stars in the crown of night, three openings into the better land, where even she had an inheritance in the God of Israel. Then good news came to her:—“She had heard in the country of Moab how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread” (v. 6). To live in this Hebrew faith would be life indeed; “the Lord” was always so near to the pious Hebrew; it was “the Lord” that sent rain; it was “the Lord” that sent the delivering angel; it was “the Lord” that spread the field with abundant harvests; it was “the Lord” who turned on the fountains of water and made them gush and sparkle in the sunshine. Account for it as we may, there is a warmth in the thought, which now and again touches us according to the pressure of our necessity and the stinging of some mortal pain. We have not gained much by striking out “the Lord” from our vocabulary, and putting in “the laws of nature,” and “the courses of creation,” and “the natural evolution of material;”—the gain is on the other side. Blessed are they who have faith to stand by the living words, and to run unto them as men who are pursued run into a strong tower. The time will come again when “the Lord” shall be a name used with reverent familiarity: men shall own the Lord in the breaking of bread, in the lying down to slumber, in the resurrection from sleep, in every pulse of the living day. Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly.

Here we have a beautiful little picture:—

“And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me” (v. 8).

What a speech!—to be worthy of such a testimony; to have so lived at home as to elicit this benediction. What a glimpse into home-life! What a quiet sabbatic house—a house sacred as an altar, secure against evil as a fortress! Is there aught so lovely, so attractive, so invaluable as a real, sunny, happy, gladsome home, where the opening of every door is an enlargement of hospitality, where the windows are all too small to receive heaven’s benison of light, where every life considers every other life, and the whole household economy is as a concerted piece of

music? In this direction all men, women, and children should move. Home should be the sweetest, happiest place on earth. On closing the household gate, the one who enters in should be able to sigh relief—release from pursuing anxieties; and the whole house should be beautiful and sacred as a church dedicated to God. In words such as we find in the eighth verse we have family life embodied in a sentence:—"The Lord deal kindly with *you*, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me." Her throat swelled with a great sob as she referred to the dead. Oh, to have no cruel reflections concerning the dead—to know that whilst they were living we did the best we could for them: we spared no trouble to lighten their burdens; we never said we were tired; we seemed rather to invite the labour than to evade it, if we could make their pillow easier and could add to their day's outlook one brighter beam of light;—then the very death sanctifies the memory, and throws a singular charm upon all the future—akin to a happy expectancy, akin to the possibility of a sudden surprise by reappearance and re-union. Do not mourn the dead, for you can do nothing to repair the injury which was inflicted upon them in their lifetime; they are beyond the reach of reparation. The only thing possible now is to do good twice over to those who are living with you, to set up—not stones, but—living tablets, sacred to the memory of the misunderstood and the ill-used, the neglected and the distressed.

"Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept" (v. 9). Not a word was said. There are times when words are simply useless; there are sacred hours when the best-chosen words fall upon our ear with a sense of irritation. "They lifted up their voice, and wept;" they kissed to one another all their meaning. A lifetime was in that pressure, memories not to be spoken in detailed expressions consecrated that kiss of love. Who can without tears cut the associations of memory and of happy and sacred life? The heart that can do so is a heart no more; it is but a piece of stone. Look upon Naomi and her daughters-in-law, see them kissing one another, and hear their weeping, and say, This is dying! What we call death is hardly so to be named at all; it is translation, liberation, sanctification, coronation; but this parting, sundering, tearing of human

hearts, this division of the life-currents—this is death! The reflection should be laid to heart in all directions. The old man at home died when his prodigal son left him. The house became a cemetery when the evil deed was done. This is the kind of death men should think about. The other death—expiration, throwing off the “mortal coil”—call not this death in any sense that is distressful! The death is in parting, the giving up the dear associations of life, in sacrificing the whole store of blessed memory.

Now we approach the issue. After further speech, reasoning on the one side and on the other, we come to this conclusion:—

“And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her” (v. 14).

Precisely how people are characterised and distinguished to-day. We do not blame Orpah; she was loving, but Ruth was more loving. That is the patent, and yet in some senses subtle, distinction. It is hard to fix upon the point where one man's quality exceeds another. For a long time they seem to be equal, but a critical juncture occurs, and at that point the quality of the man is determined. Still, let us not forget that the distinction is between loving and loving more,—not between hatred and love, not between aversion and attachment, but between love and love. Orpah loved Naomi, and indeed wanted to go with her, with a constancy, however, that was open to reasoning; Ruth loved her and shut out all reasoning, because of the passion of her affection.

“I am constant as the northern star,
Of whose true, fixed, and resting quality
There is no fellow in the firmament.”

We shall be judged according to our capacity: all people cannot love alike; all people do not hear with equal quickness; all people could not be trained to an equal state of refinement: but God will judge us all. God knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. The Lord knows that sometimes we are in circumstances which do admit of being stated in two ways, and he sees us at the point of perplexity—now looking on the reasons for going, and now looking at the reasons for not

going. He is not harsh with us. He knows our nature; he made us, and not we ourselves. It is hard to determine in some cases what is the right thing and the best thing to be done. How, then, will the judgment proceed? According to motive and purpose: where the conscience is clean, where the motive is right, the issue will be judged accordingly; the action may be a mistake, all the consequences arising out of the action may be disastrous, but in the judgment it will be the motive that will be determined:—"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me,"—in other words: let my heart be clean, let my spirit be right, let my motive be pure, let my purpose be good and honest, and then, come weal, come woe, at the last thou wilt not forsake thine erring servant. Are there not people who do precisely what Orpah did, and what Ruth did? There are certainly persons who will go with you part of the road, but they always secretly reserve the right of abandoning you: they will see how events turn out; they will draw up a kind of balance-sheet of *pro* and *con*; they hold themselves at liberty to take an independent course. Ruth did nothing of the sort—she plunged into this great stream and said she would go wherever the river went. Orpah could not have done so; it was not in her nature; she is not, therefore, to be condemned, blamed, and spoken of in contemptuous terms; even she did what she could: Ruth was Orpah *plus*.

"So from the heights of will
Life's parting stream descends,
And, as a moment turns its slender rill,
Each widening torrent bends.
From the same cradle side,
From the same mother's knee,
One to long darkness and the frozen tide,
One to the peaceful sea."

Who can read the next two verses without punctuating them with tears?—

"And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me" (vv. 16, 17).

That speech was never made by an artist; that eloquence was

never elaborated by a cunning hand in which the heart took no part. We recognise the spontaneousness of the speech. This is untaught and unteachable eloquence—the uprising and outgoing of a grand human heart. This is the human heart at its best. If any would say what is the human heart in its finest mood, he cannot do better than point to the speech made by Ruth to Naomi. What a heart it is when it is at its best, even this fallen, corrupt, deceitful human heart! How even yet it can love, suffer, enter joyously into the mystery of sacrifice, and be glad of the opportunity of giving itself away to another! Never neglect that view of the heart. Other views of the heart are sound and good, profoundly scriptural, and sorrowfully actual; they are not to be denied, mitigated, or put into false perspective; at the same time, what a heart it is! How forbearing! how loving! how forgiving! how it dreams itself into new opportunities of sacrifice! how it keeps the door ajar that the prodigal may easily come into the old homestead! how it invents surprises for those whom it loves! how it can still the footstep into a kind of whisper as the ministrant comes into the sick chamber to do good to the sufferer who is in the last extremity! What a heart it is! Surely God must have taken that view of the heart when he purposed to redeem the world! It was no cruel heart, or heart of perishable beast, but a heart like his own, touched with the mystery of the same love and quality, that Jesus came to save. We may take both views. But one is not complete without the other, and we cannot understand the mystery of redemption until we understand, in some measure, the mystery of the human heart. What a speech is Ruth's! She says in effect: Further entreaty would give me intolerable pain: do not continue the importunate suggestion that I should leave thee. To leave thee!—in what direction should I go? If I turn my face from thine, I am as one who turns from the light into a great darkness: if I leave following thee, I am as one who abandons a garden that he may walk in a wilderness; nay, we are one; we have been one these many years; we are one more than ever now that the link has broken,—we must live and die together! What is the Christian application of this absorption? No words are needed to explain it. It means that this should be the relation of the heart to Jesus Christ. Sometimes Jesus Christ seems to propose our leaving, at least he

suggests the possibility of our going away. He said to his disciples, "Will ye also go away?" Peter made the speech nearest akin to the quality of Ruth's ever made by mortal lips—"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." Is this characteristic of our personal Christianity? Is it a passion of love? The question is not, Do we esteem Christ? do we venerate him? have we a word of gracious recognition to accord to his name? The question is, Do we love him—love being pronounced with the heart, having nothing taken out of it that is essential to the completeness of its emphasis and the completeness of its sacrifice? "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Can we answer—"Lord, thou knowest all things—my sin amongst them, my inconstancy, my blasphemy—thou knowest that I love thee"? What we need in human life is not so much more information, higher intelligence, more refined culture: about these things not a word is to be said that is derogatory; but the great demand is for passionate love, clinging love, constant love, self-sacrificing love,—love always the same, never changing, never faltering, never hesitating. Who has such love? Without it we have no Christianity that is worth having. We may have all its trappings, ceremonies, mechanical pass-words, ecclesiastical privileges and honours, but we have not the love which is akin to Christ's own affection. When did love ever turn back from the living Christ? The intellect has sometimes gone away, being imperfectly trained, being marred by voluntary or involuntary ignorance, or being irritated by irrational impatience. Worldliness has gone away: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world;" respectability sometimes turns away, afraid that the next stoop of condescension may be too lowly for its dignity: but when did love go away—real love, burning, passionate, sacrificial love? when was love offended? Love suffereth long, and is kind; love outliveth all things; love never complains of the dark night, the cold wind, the heavy burden, the undesirable task, the steep hill, the stony pathway through the desert; love asks one question—Is it the Lord who is gone before? Am I walking in his footprints? Enough! Then labour is rest, and pain is sweet; disappointment is the inspiration of a larger prayer, and mortified fleshly desires are turned into nutriment ministering to the broadest, grandest, spiritual strength

Let this gospel be sounded far and wide—sounded musically, tenderly, importunately,—namely, to our information, intelligence, education, culture, critical power, genius, add burning, inexpressible love; then discord will die, and the Church will live a life of holy emulation, each member desiring and aiming to surpass the other in deeds of charity, in acts of nobleness.

SELECTED NOTE.

"There was a famine in the land" (v. 1).—The first mention of a famine which occurs in Scripture is in Gen. xii. 10, where we read that so early as the days of the patriarch Abraham "there was a famine in the land," which is described as so grievous as to compel the father of the faithful to quit Canaan. The country to which he resorted was, as we might expect, the land of Egypt, the early and lasting fertility of which is a well-known historical fact. In Gen. xxvi. 1, this famine is designated as "the first," that is, the first known, or of which there was any record. The same passage informs us of another famine which afflicted "the land" in the days of Isaac, who seems to have contemplated a descent into Egypt, but who, being instructed of God, removed to a part of Arabia Petræa (Gen. xxvi. 17) named Gerar, a city of the Philistines, whose monarch's name was Abimelech.

Even Egypt, however, was not exempt from the desolations of famine (Gen. xli. 30). The ordinary cause of dearth in Egypt is connected with the annual overflow of the Nile. . . . This famine was made by Joseph the occasion of one of the greatest social revolutions which history records. The details may be found in the book of Genesis; and it is enough to say here that, as the special administrator of the affairs of the country, Joseph got into his hands all the property of the kingdom, including the land (excepting that which belonged to the priests), and gave the same back to the people as tenants-at-will, on condition of their paying to the king "the fifth" probably of the annual produce.

From these statements it appears that three successive generations were in these early days visited by famine. The Scriptural narrative shows that in after-ages famines were, in ancient times, more frequent than they are now; and this justifies the use which is made of so terrible a scourge by the sacred writers, and especially the prophets and our Lord himself, in the highly figurative language which they employ in their righteous endeavours to turn wicked men and wicked nations from the evil of their ways (Ezek. vi. 11; Matt. xxiv. 7). In Amos viii. 11 *sq.*, a heavier woe than even the want of bread is appropriately spoken of under the appellation of a famine: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land; not a famine of bread nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord; and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it: in that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst." The ensuing verse shows that idolatry was the moving cause of this heavy punishment.

PRAYER.

O THOU that hearest prayer to answer it in great love, we come to thee in Christ thy Son, the Priest of the whole creation. He only knoweth how to pray. Lord, teach us also how to pray; inspire us with reverence; elevate us with a sense of awe; subdue and chasten us by all the sweet influences of the altar. May we look far on high, no cloud coming between us and the Father whose face our soul seeks. We would talk with God; it hath so pleased him that we may talk in our own way, out of our broken heart, telling all the tale of our sin and shame, our trespass and misery, and receiving in reply the eternal gospel that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Thou knowest all our life—every stain upon it, every flaw, every shortcoming; every honest purpose, every resolute endeavour to be right and to do thy will. What, then, can we tell thee? Yet thou art pleased to hear our speech, for the very utterance of our words thou hast made a means of grace. We speak to thee of thy goodness first, for it is first, midst, last; it is like the sky: we cannot tell where it begins, where it ends; we have measured the earth, and weighed it, and written our signature all over its face, but we know nothing about thy sky; it is an image of thyself—in vastness, in grandeur, in majesty. As the heaven is high above the earth, so are thy thoughts above our thoughts and thy ways above our ways. We therefore speak of thy mercy as ever-abiding: it is the light of the morning; it is the rest of night; it is the song of all time. Because thy compassions fail not, therefore are we not consumed. We live upon pity; we owe our existence to thy tears; if thou didst hate us surely thou wouldst crush us with some great bolt of thunder. Yet thou dost spare us, and visit us, and care for us: herein is a love beyond all words. By thy providence thou dost draw us to thy grace. Thine is a gradual process, so that having looked upon the great letter of thy goodness in life we ask for further instruction, and are led, step by step, into the inner and upper sanctuary where is the eternal truth. We first see the great cross of wood—we are amazed, we are struck with horror, our soul dies within us in very disgust; then we look at the Sufferer, and he transfigures the cross and makes it like a living tree, the leaves whereof are for the healing of the nations; we still look on, and out of his death there comes new life, new hope, new grace; we then say, Truly this Man was the Son of God; then we cast ourselves upon him, having no other refuge, no other hope—our sin our only plea, our penitence our only hope. Thus the cross of Christ becomes heaven's brightest treasure, the very centre of all glory, the very majesty of the throne. We come to that cross night and day. Thou hast not yet taken it down; thou wilt continue it until thy purpose is all served: then cometh the end, when Christ shall have delivered up the kingdom unto God and the Father, and the Lord shall

be all in all. Meanwhile, we would be saved by the cross, elevated and ennobled by the cross; we would be crucified upon it, that knowing the mystery of its pain, we may also know the power of the resurrection of Christ. We speak of thy goodness, but we know not what we say until we see the cross. Our first acknowledgments are full of selfishness. Thou hast given unto us loaves and fishes in the wilderness, and found a couch for us in the night-time and fountains of water in unexpected places, and we feel glad: but the gladness is stained through and through by self-regard. It is nothing to be glad for these things: these are appeals to our inferior nature; but when we are glad for Christ, for the spirit of grace, for the revelation of truth, for the opportunity of suffering for Christ, and for the occasion of serving him, for all the hopes which point to a destiny of deeper consecration, then we begin to touch the very magnanimity of thy Son. Our life we would live in thy sight. It is a poor little thing, cooled by the cold, affrighted by that which is high, troubled by that which is unknown; yet, nursed by thy grace, inspired and inflamed by thy Spirit, it becomes invested with somewhat of thine own almightiness—a grand life, a gift of God, not less than any donation of his hand; a mystery full of hope and full of dignity. Do with us what thou wilt. We like to be on the mountain-top first lighted by the sun, on which the eventide lingers; we like to have our own way; we like to turn our wishes into realities; we like to be strong, rich, full of friends, and having everything according to our own desire. Herein is our fault. It is this self-enlargement and self-idolatry that shames us when we really understand it. We thought it faultless once; it seemed to be quite right; it is now all wrong. This we have been taught in the school of Christ—a hard lesson, the last lesson that is taught there. So now we know what is meant by self-denial, self-obliteration. Yet we hardly know it. When we think we are dead behold we rise up again—the old pride, the ineradicable vanity, starting up in self-defence. Lord, slay us! Lord, kill us, that we may enter into our nobler selves. Take away the old man and his deeds; slay him; put him where he never can rise again; yea, banish him from our memory, and set up within us the kingdom of the new man, Christ Jesus, self-denying, self-obliterating, the great man, who lives for others, in others, and in their gladness becomes his true self. Rule all things; we know thou wilt. We are startled by the little foam, and run away as if it could do us harm. The floods lift up their voice, but they cry themselves to rest. The Lord reigneth. We put ourselves within the sanctuary, and from its open windows we behold the method of God in the world—so wise, so good, so unknowable in all its mystery, yet so gracious in its accessible points. Feed us evermore with the bread of life. Lord, evermore give us this bread! make us slaves of Christ that thus we may become freemen. Amen.

Ruth i.

THE CHARACTER OF NAOMI.

"We leave

Our home in youth—no matter to what end—

Study, or strife, or pleasure, or what not ;

And coming back in few short years, we find

All as we left it outside : . . .

But lift that latchet,—all is changed as doom."

"**I**S this Naomi?" (i. 19)—literally, is this *the* Naomi?—the reference being to a person well known, and well known because of quality and station. The name was known to every one as the name of a lady of notable degree who had been obliged to give way to circumstances that were irresistible, and who had therefore become poor, dispossessed even of bread, and sent away in great distress to undergo what would seem to be the chief punishment which Heaven could inflict. Naomi said: Do not call me by my old name; it is a name associated with joy, laughter, gladness, merry-heartedness; literally you are right: my name is Naomi, but it ought now to be Mara, associated with bitterness, real grief of soul.—Let us look carefully into the characteristics of this brave woman, and learn what we can from her name and history.

Naomi had preserved her piety in a heathen country. Some have blamed Elimelech for leaving the land of Israel and going where the god Chemosh was the ruling deity. Some people have a genius for blaming others. There have not been wanting critics who have found in the punishment inflicted upon Naomi proofs of God's disfavour in the matter of the family having run away when the famine was sore in Israel. But who are these hard-hearted critics, who are so gifted in the detection of divine punishments, and who can seat themselves upon a throne of iron and declare who is right and who is wrong in all the intermingled story of human affairs? Providence does not so come within our measurement. We had better attend to our prayers than to our criticisms. It is indeed a severer punishment still than any that fell upon the house of Elimelech to be cursed with the spirit of criticism. When an accident occurs, there are those

who can tell exactly why the accident took place, and can trace it to a direct judgment of God upon certain evil-doers. Unfortunately, the facts are against the criticism : for there were neither evil-doers nor evil-doings in many cases : the men were known to be good, the object they had in view was unquestionably right, and yet in the midst of it the collision occurred, the bridge gave way, the fire leapt upon them and left them hot ashes. We cannot tell what God is doing. We must await the issue, and when the circle is quite sphered off, then say whether it could have been drawn by any compasses made by the hands of men. Undoubtedly, however, Elimelech was in the land of Chemosh—in the land of other gods—idols, and vain images. Yet, in the midst of an atmosphere that was poisoned through and through, Elimelech was able to pray, and Naomi to refer to the God of Israel. Let us not take undue encouragement from this, and say that in any company we are safe, and in any land we can maintain our piety, and under any circumstances our prayer cannot be violated or even shortened. Men ought not to try to play with fire. There is no bravery in courting danger. Even the boldest man has need to utter the sweet prayer of modesty that he may be kept night and day within the grasp of God. It is beautiful, though, to see the widow returning from the far country, with her piety intact, never referring to the heathen idols, or confessing their sovereignty or deity : as she went out she returned, deeply thinking about God—not a great thinker, but having in her that spirit of wonder which sometimes becomes almost genius, and that strange awe of heart which enables the listening ear to detect the going of the eternal. She is home now.

Naomi suffered from the worst form of trouble. She explained her sorrow in these pathetic words :—"Why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the Lord hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me?" (i. 21). What is the worst form of trouble? The conscious absence of God, religious melancholy ; a sense of spiritual desertion, or a smarting under supposed divine judgments? No trouble can compare with that sorrow in the very blackness of darkness. It does not admit of comfort ; it looks at the comforter as an intruder—yea, as an audacious and most dangerous person. To the soul that is loaded with

darkness as with a burden, there is no Bible; there is a book large enough, but all the leaves are blank; if there are black letters upon it, they run into one another, and mean nothing in their mocking confusion. Who can speak to a soul that is religiously bruised? Who knows the tongue of that soul? Who can drop his voice into the still small whisper that can touch such a life without further wounding it? To this deep trouble we have not come, for the Bible is open before us and God's words still give us spiritual interest and satisfaction. Short of that trouble, all other distress is manageable. The presence of God sanctifies all other good, makes the dead live twice over, throngs all heaven with images of love and welcome. Let us pray, saying, "Take not thy Holy Spirit from me!" We should take care not to fall into this great agony. There is a possibility of giving way to certain influences and suggestions of a destructive character. Feeling them coming on as an armed host, we should seek immediate relief amid the healing mountains, the great mysterious waters, and all the genial influences of wise society. Who has not heard of poor creatures who have known when insanity was near at hand? Who has not read the heart-breaking story of Mary Lamb, who begged her brother to take certain measures when she felt the darkness fast deepening? That would seem to be the worst insanity—namely, the conscious approach of madness. Is there not a reason why we should take care in time with regard to this religious melancholy? May we not waste our lives away, allow our spiritual energy to ooze out of us, so that in some fell moment the devil may spring upon us, and capture us like a lawful prey? Let us watch, and be sober. While the light lingers about us in all its sacred laughter and joy, let us add to our spiritual strength, so that when the thief cometh to steal our soul's treasure we may handle him like strong men.

Naomi brought others to the true God by the might of personal character. We are not told that she preached to Ruth in any formal manner, yet Ruth said to Naomi these words,—“Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (i. 16). That is our opportunity of showing which is the true divinity. People watch us, see how we act in famine, in bereavement, in

mortal distress; and in proportion as they see our integrity untouched, our prayer enlarged rather than diminished, our confidence established upon everlasting rocks, they may begin through our character to understand our theology. Herein every man may become a preacher,—that is to say, he may become a mystery of endurance, patience, hopefulness, trust in God. What!—the enemy may say—is he not shaken off yet? Does he still cling to God? Has he not had enough of Heaven's displeasure? His house blown down, his children killed, his flocks stolen—does he still trust God? There comes a time when even a shattered life becomes an instrument of power. All men are awed by great character, by sublime endurance, by heroic patience, by tears that enlarge the eyes but never blind them. What an opportunity is this! Hardly a word spoken, no eloquence of the tongue needed, no charming imagination, no fascinating words, no wizardry of speech; yet great conversions going on night and day; persons first despising, then wondering, then admiring, and finally ascribing the mystery of sanctified endurance to the very grace of God. Although we may not be able to work great wonders in this direction, we can forbear working great destruction in the other. It will soon be discovered what our piety is worth. If the Christian man is just as afraid in a shipwreck as any other man, what is his Christianity worth? If a Christian soul is just as much troubled in times of commercial depression as the souls that resent the idea of religious faith, what is the value of his Christian sentiment? If his face is all marked over with anxiety, fear, apprehension, mourning, what has the peace of God done for him? Though we may not work mightily as heroes, we may still do a most useful work in society by quiet, silent, patient endurance. If the question be asked, as it sometimes is, To what do you trace your conversion? how often the reply is, To what I saw of Christianity at home; without understanding the books and the preachers, without being able to follow them in their arguments, I saw what Christianity could do in a house of poverty, affliction, and great sorrow many-hued, and from what I saw of it there I wish to embrace it, understand somewhat of it, love it, and exemplify it: the Christianity that made my home what it was is the religion I want. Who could give a finer reply? and blessed

be God, the reply is just. Christianity has worked these home-miracles ; Christianity has furnished a house as with blessings and treasures from heaven, and having done this, he who would embrace that religion is justified by reason and fact.

Shall it always be thus with Naomi ? Shall she die in sorrow ? We find the answer in chapter iv. :—

“And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age : for thy daughter-in-law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him” (vv. 14, 15).

Naomi saw the light again. So it shall be with us in all our sorrows if we cling to the altar, and hope steadfastly in the cross. When times are dark and our bread is moistened with our tears, when every door seems to be shut, and everything we touch fades and perishes, let us hope in God. Though weeping may endure for a night, yet joy cometh in the morning. Let us sing the old songs that made our fathers glad in the ancient days ; they will be none the worse sung in Heaven's ear if stopped with sobs and tears and quite broken as to time and tune : it is the meaning that is accepted in heaven ; no mechanical music is needed ; the correctness is in the earnestness, the acceptableness is in the sincerity. Are we to sing in the night-time ? The answer is, Most certainly. The meanest birds can sing in the day-time, what little singing they can do. What bird is it that charms the night ? Even upon us light shall arise, the morning shall break, and we shall have hope in God, and our song at mid-day shall lose nothing of loudness and sweetness because of our song at midnight. Christians are called to hope. The Lord will surely appear unto his people, and turn their sorrow into joy ; and there is no joy like that which comes out of sanctified distress. They are poor joys that come without preliminary sorrows : they are mere bubbles on the water, rising, sparkling, for a moment, breaking, and passing away into forgetfulness. Great joys that abide steadfastly through all heaven's eternity are the joys that are associated with a crucified Christ, who knew the darkness of religious desolation and felt the bitterness of spiritual orphanhood, saying, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me ?”

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we bless thee for all the children of Abraham, for all the inheritors of his faith. May our faith be as his was. May our trust in God be simple, deep, unchanging. Take charge of our whole life; keep our life in thine own eternity; touch the springs of our being, that the streams of our life may be pure. May all our springs be in God, in the living God, the Creator of the ends of the earth, the Redeemer of the family of man. May we have no charge over ourselves, no care concerning our own life; may our present and our future be entirely under the control of our Sovereign Father, as revealed unto us in the person and mediation of Jesus Christ thy Son. We thank thee for every man who, in a loud, clear, sweet tone, has declared his faith in God before all men: for every one who has been simple in his testimony, who has convinced the world by the argument of a sober and solid life of faith in the Living One,—who has in thy strength done all things wisely and well. Let this hour be holy to us! May every heart feel that it has alighted upon a flower in which there is much honey. May weary travellers know that there is a springing well here,—the well of the Lord's revelation which is never dry. May hungry hearts eat of the bread of life and be satisfied; may bruised reeds be protected; may no smoking flax be quenched; may the feeblest aspiration after the living God be answered by wondrous revelations of love to the waiting and eager heart. Give us release from the importunities of the world! Help our recollection to remember thy goodness. Save our love from the distraction of many rivals. Draw all our faculties and powers, every desire of our soul, towards thyself in profitable concentration, that in this holy hour of worship we may become strengthened for all the engagements of life. May the strong man give thee his strength. May the wise man know that thou didst light the lamp of his understanding. Save the weak man from regarding his weakness as a temptation. Turn every eye to thyself, thou Eternal Light, and bind around thy heart all the affections of our own. God be gracious unto us! Show us a love deeper than our mother's—tenderer than we have ever seen. Gather us unto thy great heart, and the storm shall never reach us there! Amen.

Ruth ii.

BOAZ A TYPE OF CHRIST.

"The fragrant sheaves of the wheat
Made the air above them sweet ;
Sweeter and more divine
Was the scent of the scattered grain,
That the reaper's hand let fall
To be gathered again
By the hand of the gleaner :
Sweetest, divinest of all,
Was the humble deed of thine,
And the meekness of thy demeanour."

BOAZ was not only a forerunner but a type of Christ. As compared with some of the greater luminaries of the Bible, Boaz was but a secondary star ; yet, in two aspects, he is amongst the brightest lights in the Biblical constellation. Even socially, Boaz is a man worth knowing—quite a healthy soul, the winds of heaven getting well around him, and the sunshine falling amply into every fold and crevice of his gracious life. Boaz had fields, and lived much in the open air. A man of cheerful voice and well-controlled hilarity ; a model agriculturist, quite a man to be copied and lived over again, age after age : so hospitable, so blithe, so strong, so bright-eyed altogether. When he came into the harvest fields he said to his reapers, "The Lord be with you ;" and the reapers answered, "The Lord bless thee." That was farm-life in the olden times. There is nothing humiliating in that scene, nothing merely sentimental ; there is the pledge of happy fellowship, sacred and prosperous co-operation. Who will not say, when looking upon scenes of this kind, that the former times were better than these ? Have we improved so very much ? Is our boasted advancement a reality in very deed ? Without pronouncing any opinion upon this, let us consider the inquiry and lay it solemnly to heart. Say, is there a sweeter picture in all domestic history than this ? Look at it : a barley field, the blue heaven like a song in colour, the blithe birds, the sharp whisk of the keen sickles amid the falling barley, the reapers turning labour into music, the master saying, "The Lord be with you," the reapers answering, "The Lord bless thee" (ii. 4).

What a welcome Boaz gave to Ruth : "Hearest thou not, my daughter? Go not to glean in another field, neither go from hence, but abide here fast by my maidens" (ii. 8). Ruth was astounded. How did Boaz know anything about her? "Then she fell on her face, and bowed herself to the ground, and said unto him, Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?" (ii. 10). Some people never can be strangers. We may never have seen them before, but to see them once is to own a kinship; we know their touch, we know their voice, we have seen them before in some dream of love or some vision of sacred fancy; they are strangers only in a very limited sense,—profoundly and truly they are of our own kith and kin, of the same quality of soul and heirs of the same expectation. "Boaz answered and said unto her, It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother in law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The Lord recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust" (ii. 11, 12). That is the way to welcome a heathen traveller. Make the pagan feel at once that all the past is forgotten, forgiven, and a new glad morning has dawned upon the enfranchised soul. Said Ruth, Why this welcome? Boaz answered, I know all about thee; I have heard the little dramatic tale; it is full of sweetness and music—God bless thee, my daughter. Yes, our deeds live after us, and go before us, and make a way for us, and come up again and again in many a fashion, and touch society with the spirit of judgment or with the spirit of friendliness. We do not shake off our yesterdays, and sustain no further relation to them; they follow us, they constitute our life, and they give accent and force and meaning to our present deeds.

But Boaz was more than all this. He was a gentleman in every feature, and he was also an unconscious prophet. Who knows all the meaning of his own word? Who can explain all the issue and ultimate relationship of the simplest things which he does, in the Church, or in the harvest-field, or in

any sphere of life? We know not what part we are taking in the building-up of God's fabric. Sometimes when we little suppose we are doing anything at all towards building the temple of God, we are working most industriously and definitely in that direction. Boaz was but a farmer, a valiant man and wealthy, beloved by his servants, prosperous in his day; but beyond all that he was permitted, by the grace of God, to forecast the future. He was more than himself, or his whole self he had failed to recognise. This is the view we must take of life if we would live largely and usefully in the broadest sense of that term. Sometimes the work appears to come back to us without profit or gracious answer; but we know that it shall not always be so: the preaching of the word is seed cast into the ground, and the seed does not grow in one night. Sometimes life's monotony wearies us; we say, As it was yesterday, so it is to-day, and to-morrow will see no change; and we are overborne by this sad dreariness. Let us look back into history in order that our cheerfulness may be revived. Men do not know what they are doing, even in prosecuting their ordinary avocations. The barley harvest may be as a sacrament, the open field an unroofed church, the gracious words spoken to strangers may come back again in prophecy and its sublimest fulfilment.

Boaz was a type of Christ. Boaz was the Goel of his family. Boaz was the next-of-kin—in other words, he was the Goel. What part did the Goel play in the Hebrew family? The Goel was the redeemer in the first place, and the Goel was the avenger in the second place. In both these respects Boaz was a type of Christ. Let us understand something in detail which ought to be interesting to the youngest readers respecting the functions of the Goel. If a Hebrew was so poor, reduced to such extremity of distress, that he had to mortgage—to use a modern expression—his land, to encumber it, to bring it under obligation to a stranger, it was the business of the Goel of that particular family to redeem that land, and restore it to its rightful owner. When the silver trumpets of Jubilee sounded, all the land was free; but even in the years between one Jubilee and another, if the Hebrew tiller was so reduced as to be obliged to borrow upon his land, the Goel was bound to redeem

it. The land itself never could be ceded. The Hebrew had no land to sell; he had only current rights, temporary interests, immediate advantages to dispose of: the land itself belonged to Israel, and in the year of Jubilee that doctrine was broadly asserted and minutely realised: but, as we have said, in the meantime men might be reduced to poverty, or be glad to avail themselves of the kindness of those who were round about them, or even to ask the stranger and alien to lend them something upon their lease. Then came up the next-of-kin—literally, the Goel—and redeemed the land, and restored the citizen to his place in the commonwealth of Israel. Is not Jesus Christ our Goel in this respect? Are we not all poor, dispossessed of everything, mean, self-helpless? That was our condition before God; that was the condition upon which Christ looked when he took up his position as our Goel, or Redeemer. But we have said the Goel was next-of-kin—was Christ akin to man? That was his peculiar glory in his official or redeeming capacity: “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same . . . he took not on him the nature of angels”—then he would not have been akin to us—“but he took on him the seed of Abraham,” and thus became our Kinsman; thus he was not ashamed to call us brethren. As our elder Brother, he is our Goel. He has come to redeem humanity, to enrich it with infinite and eternal wealth.

Take another view of the Goel’s function in Hebrew history. If a Hebrew sold himself into the service of another Hebrew he lost none of his rights; his citizenship was still recognised, and his prospects were honoured and fulfilled; but if the Hebrew sold himself into servitude to an alien or heathen, it was the place of his Goel or next-of-kin to come forth and emancipate him; there could be no slaves of that kind in Israel: the next-of-kin was bound to espouse the cause of the bondman, to redeem him, to break his chain, to buy him off, and to invest him with liberty. Here, again, at the time when the trumpets of Jubilee sounded, liberty was proclaimed to all; but in the meantime the Goel took up his function and discharged his gracious responsibility: he redeemed the slave. Herein it is easy to see how Boaz was a type of Christ. We were all bondmen, sold under sin, heavy

laden with the chains of bondage; and when there was no eye to pity, no arm to save, our Goel pitied, and his right arm wrought deliverance. He is our Emancipator, our Redeemer. Job said, "I know that my Goel liveth." That noble verse loses nothing of its best meaning by the use of the Hebrew word. In the English Bible the reading is, "I know that my Redeemer liveth;" but the verse is still invested with ineffable meaning and suggestiveness when it is read: I know that my Goel—my next-of-kin—liveth, and that he will appear to redeem and bless.

There was another function—namely, the function of the Avenger. If an Israelite had been wronged, injured, or slain, who was to see to the rectification of the case? who was to demand and execute justice? The Goel. This he was bound to do. It was not left to his choice whether he would do so or not; it was the prerogative and place of the Goel to avenge wrong, injustice, murder. And is there not an avenging element in the priesthood and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ in his Church? Do we take a complete view of the Saviour when we think of him only as meek, lowly, gentle, loving, forbearing—a Man all tears? He can be described by such compassionate and gracious terms; not a word can be too endearing to apply to the Son of God in his office in relation to sin-destroyed humanity; but we read also of "the wrath of the Lamb;" he rules sometimes "with a rod of iron;" in some cases he "dashes" the enemy "in pieces like a potter's vessel;" and men are exhorted to "kiss the Son lest he be angry," to make peace with him "whilst his wrath is kindled but a little;" into that mystery of wrath we may not enter; who would force his way into that thunder-cloud? Enough it is to recognise its blackness and its terrible-ness, and to remember that "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Whatever hell may be, it is something indescribably awful. There all thinkers may agree. Whilst controversy may rage about definitions and the right application of terms, about etymologies and figures of speech, there remains the tremendous and unchangeable reality, that whatever the fate of the impenitent sinner may be, it is inconceivably and indescribably appalling. (My soul, come not thou into that secret!)

Boaz, as we have said, was described as the next-of-kin—literally, the Goel—and to their own Goel all the distressed families of Israel had a right to look. Blessed be God, we have been invested in that right by Jesus Christ. He desires to be looked to; he invites our appeal; he says in effect: Tell me how your land is situated, what burdens rest upon it; tell me what are your domestic conditions: is the father dead? Is the house full of widowhood and orphanhood, and all forms of distress? Relate all the circumstances to me; I am your next-of-kin, and I will deliver and redeem, avenge and bless. Into his ever-listening ear pour all the tale of human want and woe, as speaking to One who is akin—next-of-kin—the Goel of humanity. We need the assurance that there is some such Goel. At times all things seem to be against us, and no voice is lifted up in our defence and for our comfort: all men seem to forsake us and flee. In that hour we need some such inspiration as comes from the assurance that our next-of-kin—our Goel—will never leave us nor forsake us. When we need him most he is nearest to us.

Not only was Boaz a Goel, he was a Menuchah, or rest, in whose protection Ruth found security. Menuchah means an asylum of rest, a protection of honour, a security that cannot be violated; and then in its last signification it means the very omnipotence and pavilion of God. In this respect Boaz was the type of Christ. In chapter iii. 1, we read, "Then Naomi her mother in law said unto her, My daughter, shall I not seek rest for thee—shall I not seek a Menuchah for thee—that it may be well with thee?" The house of her husband was called the Menuchah of the wife—that is to say, the asylum of rest and protection. The orphanage is the Menuchah of the orphan. All homes, Christian institutions, asylums founded in the spirit of Christ and for the use of Christ, might be appropriately termed Menuchahs—places of rest, asylums of security, pavilions defended by the almightiness of God. There was a certain land promised to Israel. In the hope of attaining that land Israel lived and toiled for many a year. What would Israel call that promised land? The Menuchah. To reach that Menuchah was the hope of Israel; to stand upon the soil of that promised Canaan was to be sure of the nearness and protection of the God

of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. Then, in its highest religious meaning, the Menuchah signifies the peace, favour, rest and protection of God. Jesus Christ said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will be your Menuchah—I will give you rest"—sabbatic rest, complete peace, infinite reconciliation, the harmony in which there is no discord, the rest unbroken by a dream, undisturbed by any fear in the night-watches. All this is made the more vividly clear if we look at the case of Boaz and Ruth. Boaz was a near kinsman. There was one nearer still, but he declined to take up the functions of the family Goel; then what we might call the Goelship fell to the lot of Boaz, and he assumed the responsibility and prosecuted the task. Then Boaz was, moreover, a rest—the man who afforded a sense of security to the poor wandering Moabitess. He was the Menuchah, the grand living asylum, in whose love Ruth found peace and security.

"She stood breast-high amid the corn,
Clasped by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won.
On her cheeks an autumn flush
Deeply ripened—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.
Round dark eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veiled a light
That had else been all too bright.
And her hat, with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim;
Thus she stood amid the stocks,
Praising God with sweetest looks.
'Sure,' I said, 'Heaven did not mean
Where I reap thou should'st but glean;
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.'"

Transfer all these images to the Lord Jesus Christ, and see how beautifully they apply in every instance to the Messiah. He is our Goel; he will mightily redeem us: he will take back from the hands of the enemy all the prey which the enemy has seized; the foe will have to deliver up whatever he has possessed

himself of that belongs to God and humanity. The Goel will see us put into a secure position; a position of righteousness, of solid defence, of truth and probity. Then is he not the soul's Menuchah—the soul's resting-place, the soul's eternal asylum? Have we not sought peace everywhere and failed in the pursuit? Have we not hewn out to ourselves cisterns, and found them to be broken cisterns that could hold no water? Have we not made a bed for ourselves in the wilderness, and found that we were pillowing our heads upon the sharp thorns? Amid all life's tumult and the maddening pain of the soul, there has come this sweet voice: Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will be your Goel, your Menuchah; I will mightily deliver you and lead you into the rest of God. This is what we teach about Jesus Christ. These are the sublime truths we associate with his name. In all history men have needed a Goel or a deliverer, a Menuchah or a rest; and all the anxiety, strife, pain of the world's history, seemed to point in the direction of One who himself would combine the strength of the Goel and the grace of the Menuchah.

Thus a great historical gate is opened. Boaz was the father of Obed, Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse was the father of David—the darling of Israel and the man after God's own heart. How little we know what we are doing! Who can tell what the next link in the chain will be? Let us persevere in our work as God may give us opportunity and grace. Sometimes it is very heavy; sometimes quite dreary; sometimes the sun is practically blotted out, and all the sky is in mourning. But if we rest on eternal principles, if we believe in the omnipotence of God, we shall live to see the return of the sun, and in the brightness of morning we shall forget the blackness and the sadness of night.

Looking at the Book of Ruth as a whole, we are struck with the marvellous working of providence. The book had a sad opening. It opened like a cloudy day. It began with famine and misery, and went onward into widowhood twice told; and the first chapter is like a rain of tears. We could not understand why it should be so—why there should be a famine in Israel. The famine might have been elsewhere: why not afflict the

heathen with famine, and let Israel, and Christian peoples, as we now term them, enjoy bountiful harvests, pulling down their barns to build greater? Why does the lightning strike the very steeple of the church? On the story goes, and God is working in it all. In the darkness his hand seems to be groping after something that he may loop on to something that had gone before. The movement of God is a movement of very subtle and intricate connections. Sometimes we wonder how the next link can be found, and often it is found in the night-time when we cannot see either the finder or the link he has found. Look at such portion of society as is open to our survey, and see how wonderful are the associations which have been made in life—the unexpected relationships, the strange coincidences, the marvellous creations of help, deliverance, and friendship culminating in the most practical affection. How are these people brought together? There was no plan in it on the human side; there was nothing on the human side but surprise; yet how the movement has proceeded, and how out of mysteries has happiness been consolidated! You heard a discourse, and it became the turning-point in your life; you listened to a prayer, and whilst it was arising to heaven you made solemn oath and vow that you would be better, and that vow has been redeemed: you went into a public assembly, and saw a face, the seeing of which has changed the whole course of your life. The providence of God is not an Old Testament story; it is the action of the day, the movement now circling around us,—the rustling of the leaves, the ploughing up of the land, the singing of the birds, the occurrences at home and abroad. Behold the hand of the living God, and in that hand put your trust. The most mysterious action of this providence was the bringing-in of the Gentiles. A new thing has been wrought in Israel: a Moabitess is numbered among the chosen children. Now that we read the story backwards we see the meaning of it all. Reading it as the facts occurred, the reading was often rough and most difficult. How true it is that we must wait to the end to see the real meaning of the beginning! When God's way is finished, God's way will be clear. We ought to take an interest in the introduction of Ruth into the sacred lineage, because she was the first-fruits of the people to whom we belong. She was a heathen woman, an outsider, a

Gentile, and we belonged once to that outlawed class. Mean it is of us to say we do not take any interest in the conversion of distant nations, when we ourselves were once a distant nation, and have been converted to the faith and crown of Christ. We are not true to our own history, or grateful for our own deliverance, in the degree in which we are indifferent to the conversion of those who are afar off. Ruth was our first-fruits; Ruth was our kinswoman in the larger sense. Blessed be God for the introduction of our sister into Israel. She was in the direct line of the Son of God. The Gentile woman became a progenitor of God's own Christ. A strange genealogy! Having perused it line by line we know what it is:—the great king, the unknown man, the harlot, the Gentile Ruth,—they all stand there, a symbolic humanity, so that when the Son of God comes, he comes not in one direction alone, not as born of the Jew only, but of a line of kings; in him all men are gathered up—the mightiest, the weakest, the wanderer, the homeless. Verily this Man was the Son of God—the Incarnate Deity!

NOTE.

IF the PEOPLE'S BIBLE has to be limited to twenty-five volumes, and certainly I do not think it would be wise seriously to increase the number, it is evident that the point has been reached when condensation must begin. In my judgment compression will be least felt in the books which come between Ruth and Job, not only because they are almost wholly historical, but principally because they are marked by much repetition of detail. This explanation would seem to be necessary in view of considerable change of method within the indicated limits: when we come to the Book of Job we shall need all the space which can be allowed, for in that immortal drama the battles of the world are fought. Were I to mark down what might be called my chronological experience as a Bible reader, I should not hesitate to say that, up to this moment, my careful perusal of the Bible has increasingly confirmed my faith in its divine inspiration and authority. Without proceeding one page beyond the Book of Ruth, I know of a surety that the preceding portions of the Bible are not the work of inventors, dreamers, or impostors. The composition is too artless for a schemer, the history is too vivid for a dreamer, and the morality is too exacting for a libertine. My knowledge of the Bible increases my reverence for it in every aspect.

THE FIRST BOOK OF SAMUEL.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou comfortest those that be bowed down. Thou liftest up those whose souls cleave unto the dust. The Lord is very pitiful and kind, and truly his mercy endureth for ever. It comes to us before the light of the morning, it remains with us when the sun has gone down, it is our guardian by night, it doth beset us behind and before and defend us from all evil. We desire, therefore, humbly to recognise thy mercy in the whole course of our life; we would see it everywhere giving strength and beauty, and meaning and pathos, to all the affairs of our daily history. Help us evermore to know that our power is in thy mercy; that we have no strength but in thy strength; that out of thy fulness alone can we receive grace upon grace. May we be released from all worldly memories, from all tormenting anxieties. May our souls be led away into the light! May our spirits be blessed with unspeakable peace! Ever teach us how to pray. May the desires of our heart be pure; may our purposes before God be simple, and may our whole supplication rise from the Saviour's cross, that even in our prayers we may know the mystery of self-sacrifice. What we pray, we pray in the Mediator's name; there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus, through whom, the Child of Bethlehem, the Man of sorrows, the mighty and only Redeemer of our souls, we offer every desire of our hearts. Forgive our sins. Cleanse our thoughts by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Establish thy counsels in our hearts that they may be repronounced in our daily life; and may our whole course be elevated and sanctified by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Now what wait we for, but for the opening of heaven, that we may receive the blessing we have no room to contain, that we may be satisfied with the peace which passeth understanding! Unto the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, whom we adore as Three Persons in one God, be the kingdom and the power and the glory, world without end. Amen.

1 Samuel i.

1. Now there was a certain man [literally, one man] of Ramathaim-zophim [abbreviated to la-Ramah. The village of Ramah was built on two hills], of mount Ephraim [the hill country of Ephraim], and his name was Elkanah, the son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an

Ephrathite [this tracing through four generations agrees with the family registers in I Chron. vi. The epithet belongs to Elkanah, not to Zuph]:

2. And he had two wives [Lamech was the first to violate the law of one wife only]; the name of the one was Hannah [grace or favour], and the name of the other Peninnah [modern: Margaret, coral or pearl]; and Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.

3. And this man went up out of his city yearly [to the feast of unleavened bread] to worship, and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts [the first time in the Old Testament that the name Jehovah Sabaoth occurs,—it occurs two hundred and sixty times in the Old Testament. It is used sixty times by Isaiah, and about eighty times by Jeremiah] in Shiloh [rest: a sacred city in Ephraim]. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, the priests of the Lord, were there [Eli himself is not mentioned. He was still high priest, but too old to take part in the offering of sacrifice].

4. ¶ And when the time was that Elkanah offered, he gave to Peninnah his wife, and to all her sons and her daughters, portions:

5. But unto Hannah he gave a worthy portion [one portion for two persons: ■ double portion]; for he loved Hannah: but the Lord had shut up her womb.

6. And her adversary [her rival] also provoked her sore, for to make her fret [so much for polygamy!], because the Lord had shut up her womb.

7. And as he did so year by year, when she went up to the house of the Lord, so she provoked her; therefore she wept, and did not eat [of her portion].

8. Then said Elkanah her husband to her, Hannah, why weepest thou? and why eatest thou not? and why is thy heart grieved? am not I better to thee than ten sons [a round number to signify many]?

9. ¶ So Hannah rose up after they had eaten in Shiloh [after the sacrificial meal was over; literally, after she had eaten in Shiloh, and after she had drunk], and after they had drunk. Now Eli the priest sat upon a seat [a chair, or throne of state] by a post of the temple [palace] of the Lord.

10. And she was in bitterness of soul [literally, bitter of soul], and prayed unto the Lord, and wept sore ["Prayers and tears are the saints' great guns and scaling-ladders."—*Luther*].

11. And she vowed a vow, and said, O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head [a perpetual Nazarite].

12. And it came to pass, as she continued praying [as she multiplied to pray] before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth.

13. Now Hannah, she spake in [to] her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been drunken [made possible by the moral degradation of the time].

14. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken [knowing that she had newly risen from a feast]? put away thy wine from thee.

15. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord.

16. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial [the devil]: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto.

17. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace: and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him.

18. And she said, Let thine handmaid find grace in thy sight. So [having cast her burden on the Lord] the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.

19. ¶ And they rose up in the morning early, and worshipped before the Lord, and returned, and came to their house to Ramah: and Elkanah knew Hannah his wife; and the Lord remembered her.

20. Wherefore [and] it came to pass, when the time was come about [literally, at the revolution of the days] after Hannah had conceived, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel [heard of God], saying, Because I have asked him of the Lord.

21. And the man Elkanah, and all his house, went up to offer unto the Lord the yearly sacrifice, and his vow [vows were characteristic of this particular age of the Judges].

22. But Hannah went not up; for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned [weaning took place very late among the Hebrews—usually for two years, sometimes for three], and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever.

23. And Elkanah her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth thee good; tarry until thou have weaned him; only the Lord establish his word [may the Lord fulfil his designs]. So the woman abode, and gave her son suck until she weaned him.

24. ¶ And when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bullocks [one for a burnt offering, the two were yearly], and one ephah of flour, and a bottle of wine, and brought him unto the house of the Lord in Shiloh: and the child was young.

25. And they slew a bullock, and brought the child to Eli.

26. And she said, Oh my lord, as thy soul liveth [an oath peculiar to the Books of Samuel and to the Books of Kings], my lord, I am the woman that stood by thee here, praying unto the Lord.

27. For this child I prayed; and the Lord hath given me my petition which I asked of him.

28. Therefore also I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the Lord. And he ["Neither Elkanah nor Samuel have been mentioned, and cannot therefore be meant. Hannah must be the subject, and the masculine of the verb is used, as in v. 7, though the subject is feminine."—*The Speaker's Commentary*] worshipped the Lord there.

1 Samuel i. 20.

"Samuel . . . because I have asked him of the Lord."

THE BIRTH OF SAMUEL.

HANNAH, the wife of Elkanah, besought the Lord for a man child. This draws our attention to the scope of human prayer. Men cannot pray by rule. We do but mock men when we say, You must pray for this and not for that. Such an exhortation may do for a man when his heart is not inflamed by the passion of godly desire ; it may do for him in his coldest and most indifferent mental states. But when he is in his most vehement and determined moods, he cannot be fettered and limited by such exhortations. We need something more for our guidance than mere maxims. A maxim is too narrow for life. We need principles which can shrink into maxims and can expand into revelations as the exigencies of life may require. Sometimes we are cold and dull,—then a maxim will do : sometimes our strength rises to full flood,—then we need inspiration. You cannot conduct life in its highest phases and its intensest desires by any set of maxims. You can only control and elevate life by having principles which can shrink and expand,—adapt themselves when man's moral temperature rises, when his strength rises, and suit themselves to all the varying phases and wants of his life. Tell Hannah that she ought not to pray for what God has not seen fit to give her, and she scorns your formal piety and your tabulated counsels. Why ? She is not in a mood to receive that kind of instruction ; there is a hunger in her heart ; through her own love she sees far into the love of God ; and by the eagerness of her desire she goes far away, with bleeding weary feet, from beaten paths and accepted roads, that she may bind God by the very importunateness of her love. That is not the kind of woman into whose ear you can drop a little formal maxim with any effect. Your religion will be to her profanity, if you cannot address her in a higher tone—meet her just where her soul is. She is borne away by the passion of her desire ; there is one dominating force in her nature that transfigures everything, that defies difficulties, that surmounts obstacles, and that waits with trembling nervous patience till

God come. What is love if it be not fiery? What is prayer if it be not the heart on a blaze? Prayer is not mere articulation; prayer is not mere words. Prayers are battles; prayers are the thunders which call for God when he seems to be far away!

Yonder is a wild goat, living on stony hills and desert places. He has wandered a long way from pasture, from food of any kind. In the madness of his hunger he sees on farther edge, five hundred fathoms above the level, just one little tuft of grass—the only green thing within a circuit of miles. It is a dangerous place, but then he is in a dangerous condition. He climbs to it,—the rock almost trembles under him. A moment more, and, hundreds of fathoms below, he lies a bleeding mass. But impelled by hunger, he does what only the fierce courage of despair dare do. So it is with that keener hunger of human souls. We do sometimes pray for things that lie away from the line of ordinary devotion; we would not pray for them but for that over-mastering, irresistible, spiritual force that holds us in its mighty hand. If we were in coolness and sobriety of spirit and temper, we should be able to reason about it and to put things together and to draw inferences. Man is not fully man when he stands upon his feet; he touches the highest point of his manhood when he lifts the pinions of faith and hope, and goes off into the Unknown if haply he may find God! If you do not know what the hunger is you do not know what the prayer is. You cannot feel as Hannah did without you have been in great straits, and when for the time you have been the willing victim of a glowing and grand desire. But is there not a limit? Yes, there is a limit, and it is sometimes well not to look at it in the light of a limit. It is true that we are shut up like the sea and watched like the whale, but that is no reason why we should shrivel into a pool or dwindle into a minnow. What is the limit of our prayer? This: “Not my will, but thine, be done!” Is that a limit?—it is glorious liberty! Not my will, but thine,—not a little will, but a great will,—not my thought, but thine,—not my love, but thine! Is that a limit? It is the lark rising from its field-nest into the boundless liberty of the firmament! Truly we do not limit ourselves when we exchange the creature for the Creator. When we take up our little thought

and say, "Lord, this is what we want,—but not our will but thine be done," do we then throw away the greater for the less? It is a contrast, and only such a contrast as you find in the earth and heaven, in the blazing sun and the misty night.

Need we say that there are some things which are not fit subjects for prayer? that there are some things which do not lie directly in the devotional line? For example, no man is at liberty to pray for wealth, merely as such. "Lord, give me riches," would not be prayer; it would be profanity, it would be covetousness carried to the point of blasphemy. Wealth, as such, does not lie in the line of devotion, but far away from it, and can only be made incidental to it by certain moral considerations which the possessor of wealth may possibly know nothing at all about. Looked at in itself, Hannah's prayer was selfish and poor in its spiritual tone; but the woman did not know what she was praying for altogether. It is so with us in our highest devotions. God inspires the prayer, and then answers it; dictates the language, and then satisfies the petition. So that persons who are asking for what may be called a little ordinary daily blessing, may, in reality, be asking for a gift the influence of which shall reach through ages, shall palpitate through eternity. Hannah says, Give me a man child! She knows not the destinies that are involved in that prayer. And that prayer is not her own. Her petition is but the echo of a higher voice. Herein is the mystery of prayer. There be cold, formal, rudimentary prayers; there be labial prayers—prayers that come from the lips only; and there be words which are revelations of Christ—subdued sighings of the soul, which God prompts and regulates, and which are sent for the trial of our patience and strength, that God may bring in upon our little petition a greater answer than our fancy ever dreamed, than our love ever dared expect!

We shall see in what an extraordinary mental and spiritual state Hannah was, as we read from the twelfth to the sixteenth verses:—

"And it came to pass, as she continued praying before the Lord, that Eli marked her mouth. Now Hannah, she spake in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard: therefore Eli thought she had been

drunken. And Eli said unto her, How long wilt thou be drunken? put away thy wine from thee. And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit: I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Count not thine handmaid for a daughter of Belial: for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken hitherto."

A beautiful speech of the heart! Alas, men may be drunk, but not with wine! There is grief that has upon us all the effect of poison in the blood. There are anxieties that make us stagger to and fro like drunken men. There are paroxysms, hungers, and straits in life which take away from us our balance and equipoise, and which make us look almost insane in the eyes of men who are calm and cool, and who are limited by the ordinary conditions of life. The ordinary cannot judge the extraordinary. A man when he has all his senses about him, and would therefore feel himself in his most judicious mood, cannot reach certain cases—they lie mile on mile beyond him. Only grief can understand grief; only poetry can understand poetry; only love can interpret love; and only a woman in Hannah's mood can understand the trembling of Hannah's lips. We should be careful how we judge one another. Here is Eli, a priest of the living God, calling a woman drunken,—when she is insane in worship, when she is mad in the ecstasy of waiting upon God. There is a madness that is not lunacy; there is an insanity that is the sublimest serenity. Priests do not always understand people. Official persons seldom do understand extra officials. Eli had been accustomed to look upon persons, and to see them behave themselves under certain limits; he had observed them displaying certain decorums when they came into the neighbourhood of the holy place. But here is something he never saw before; and the priest of the living God, ordained and consecrated—who ought to have had a word of charity for the lowliest creature beneath his feet—instantly, with that little remnant of devil that is in the best men, says, "Thou art drunken!" Oh, when will priests be charitable! When shall we put the better and not the worse construction on extraordinary signs and tokens! When shall we speak hopefully! "Men would be better if we better deemed them."

There are three remarkable things in this case. First: Here

is a religious household disquieted by one unhappy element. Hannah's life was lived under the harrow of Peninnah's reproach. The household was a religious one. Elkanah went out of the city to worship and to sacrifice unto the Lord of hosts in Shiloh. Hannah was a praying woman. We have every reason to suppose that, speaking in general terms, the household was markedly religious; yet there was shot through it one unhappy, disquieting, poisoning element. Let us get away from all that is merely local in the incident, and dwell upon the principle that one sinner destroyeth much good. The head of the house is a worshipping man, reverent, strong in faith, punctilious in religious observances; those that are round about him have religious convictions and religious strength. Yet there is something in the household—just one little microscopic thing—that spoils the heaven. You cannot exhort people to get out of that. The element is little and insignificant in itself; but still it requires a vital remedy. The disquieting cause is different in different houses. In almost every house there is some little spiteful spirit; in almost every family there is somebody that has the power of sneering at other people; in most households undoubtedly there are members who can drop just one scalding drop into a sore place and make it sorer. It can be done so that you cannot print it and publish it; it can be done so that you cannot report it; it can be done so that you can only feel it. These are the miseries that spoil many lives. Who are we—happily situated, having little or nothing to interrupt our domestic joy—that we should in an off-handed manner exhort people to be more patient, and to be this and that and the other, when we ourselves could not be so if we were under the same circumstances? Understand, it is these little, insignificant things that destroy the happiness of a human home. Not great fights, not periodical revolutions in the domestic state; but hasty little words, untimely shruggings of the shoulder, and sneers that are no sooner on the lip than away. What is the cure for all that kind of disease? There is only one cure, and that is, Crucifixion with Jesus Christ. Observe, not mere crucifixion. You may nail a man's hand—both hands, both feet—and crush thorns into his temple till he is bathed in blood; but you may not touch the devil that is in him. He must be crucified; but he must be

crucified with Christ in his spirit, thoughts, and purposes. Sympathy with the cross of Christ takes out of human nature the last drop, the final dreg and sediment of evil, hatred, and bitterness; and nothing but that will touch the disease. We may compromise; we may bear and forbear; we may make our life a game at setting up little pieces of wood, and piling up little cards in a certain shape, keeping every breath of wind away lest the little structure should be overturned. That is not life. The only true life is based on right, love, nobleness, law, charity, kindness. All this we find only in that manly, womanly, godly Heart that burst on Calvary.

The second remarkable thing is: A religious use of a daily provocation. Peninnah persecuted Hannah daily; laughed at her, mocked her, jeered her, provoked her sore to make her fret; provoked her to tears, to fasting, to grief of heart. Hannah was in bitterness of soul and wept sore. What use did she make of this daily torment? Do not let us fix upon the one particular thing that she had in view, or the one special difficulty that annoyed and perplexed her; but get into the principle of the case. What was the use which she made of this daily torment? It was a religious use. She prayed unto the Lord; she rose up and went forward that she might pray mightily before God; she spake in her heart and she poured out her soul before God. That was conquest,—that was victory! There is a possibility of having a daily annoyance, and yet turning that daily annoyance into an occasion of nearer and nearer approach to God. Let us then endeavour to turn all our household griefs, family torments into occasions of profound worship and loving homage to God. It was in human nature to avenge the insult; to cry out angrily against the woman who delighted in sneering and in provoking. But there is something higher than human nature, something better. And is it not our business, is it not better, indeed, that we should try, at all events, to get away from the human nature, which we are too prone to worship in its generalisation, and seek the divine nature, which has in it the interpretation of every difficulty and the remedy for every affliction? It could not be easy to bear the daily annoyance. A footfall heard in the house might mean a coming sorrow; a sound heard

in the distance might awaken painful memories; a turn of a sentence, though it might be unintentional and unconscious on the part of the guilty individual, might afflict the soul. The worst suffering is subtle and unspeakable, and hardly to be told or to be hinted at,—made up of ten thousand little things, any one of which is not worthy of a moment's consideration. Yet here is a woman who was able to triumph over all these things, and to bring them in as helps to her continual prayer.

The third thing that is remarkable is,—the religious recognition of family mercies. When the son was born—the son for whom Hannah had been praying many a day—she called his name Samuel, “heard of God.” Let us dwell carefully on this point, because everybody is embraced in the application of this truth. We have prayed for a long time for a given object; that object has at length been yielded to us. What then?

“And Hannah prayed, and said, My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord; for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God. . . . The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them. He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail” (ii. 1, 2, 7, 8, 9).

So sang the rejoicing woman whose prayer had been answered. Praise should always follow answered prayer.

It was thus with one man. He was very ill; a great strong man in his day; yet disease touched him, shrivelled him up, laid him upon a lowly bed, made him pray to the humblest creature in his house for favours hour after hour. As he lay there, in his lowliness and weakness, he said, “If God would raise me up I would be a new man, I would be a devout worshipper in the sanctuary, I would live to his glory.” And God lifted him up again; did not break the bruised reed, did not quench the smoking flax, but permitted the man to regain his faculties. And he was not well one month before he became as worldly as he was before his affliction. He prayed as if his heart loved God; and when he got his health back again he was a practical atheist—he was virtually the basest of blasphemers.

It was thus with another man. He had nothing when he started in life. He used to run errands; to sweep doorsteps, and burnish bells in order that he might get some little gifts to buy his next meal with; and he went on suffering daily. He said, "If God would but bring a turn upon my fortune so that I could make something, I would turn all his gifts to the blessing of my fellow-men; I would show the true use of riches; I would be a Christian; in the midst of my abounding prosperity, I would give a spiritual meaning to all the material gifts of God." His little was doubled, then his little became much, and his much became more, and he became,—what? He would not look at a poor man; he was ashamed to be seen of men who knew him in his low estate; he was a conceited, swaggering fool! Now the reverse in both these cases is possible. It is possible to be lifted up from the bed of affliction and become a burning, shining light in fulfilment of a vow. It is possible to get on from nothing to little, from little to much, and in the midst of abounding prosperity to be a thankful recipient of God's mercies,—a gentle little child,—made for the time being a steward of God's gifts.

Blessed are the men who have had praying mothers. The influence of that fact they cannot shake off. They may curse and swear, and go to the very boundary of the pit; nay, go into it, and we doubt whether in all their suffering they can ever shake off the influence of having had a praying mother. The mother's devotion comes up in the boy's veneration, love of right, conscientiousness, magnanimous hope, gentle courage. As with the boy and the mother, so with the girl and father. Sex is not a physiological question only. We find the sex element in disposition, in thinking, in quality of strength. Blessed are they who have had a praying ancestry. As for such as have not had praying forefathers, there is no reason why they should be lost and thrown away. God is our Father; and when father and mother forsake us, he will take us up. He will lift the beggars from the dunghill and set them among princes, and make them inherit the throne of glory.

Let no man be cast down. Let those who have had praying

mothers be charged, as by a captain of the Lord of hosts, that they go to the front of the fight, and be the most valorous men in God's camp. Let those who have been born into the world, and have had nothing but darkness and sorrow ever since they came into it, know that Jesus Christ receiveth sinners and eateth with them; and that when he looks upon a sinner the sinner is transfigured into the son of Abraham,—as when the morning light looks upon a folded flower it opens its beautiful leaves and shows its thankfulness by telling all the secrets of its heart!

SELECTED NOTE.

It is on the mother of Samuel that our chief attention is fixed in the account of his birth. She is described as a woman of a high religious mission. Almost a Nazarite by practice (1 Sam. i. 15) and a prophetess in her gifts (1 Sam. ii. 1), she sought from God the gift of the child for which she longed with a passionate devotion of silent prayer, of which there is no other example in the Old Testament, and when the son was granted, the name which he bore, and thus first introduced into the world, expressed her sense of the urgency of her entreaty—*Samuel*, "the asked or heard of God."

Living in the great age of vows, she had before his birth dedicated him to the office of a Nazarite. As soon as he was weaned, she herself, with her husband, brought him to the tabernacle at Shiloh, where she had received the first intimation of his birth, and there solemnly consecrated him. The form of consecration was similar to that with which the irregular priesthood of Jeroboam was set apart in later times (2 Chron. xiii. 9)—a bullock of three years old (LXX.), loaves (LXX.), an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine (1 Sam. i. 24). First took place the usual sacrifices (LXX.) by Elkanah himself, then, after the introduction of the child, the special sacrifice of the bullock. Then his mother made him over to Eli (i. 25, 28), and (according to the Hebrew text, but not the LXX.) the child himself performed an act of worship.

The hymn which followed on this consecration is the first of the kind in the sacred volume. It is possible that, like many of the Psalms, it may have been enlarged in later times to suit great occasions of victory and the like. But verse 5 specially applies to this event, and verses 7 and 8 may well express the sense entertained by the prophetess of the coming revolution in the fortunes of her son and of her country.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we are all thine ; we are twice thine. Thou didst make us, and not we ourselves, and thou didst redeem us with the precious blood of Christ, and bring us out of a worse than Egyptian bondage. We wrestle not with flesh and blood—against these there is an answer, sure and unchangeable—but with principalities and powers, with spiritual temptations, with difficulties of the soul, with nameless forces and malignest mysteries of darkness. These are our foes ; we cannot see them ; we cannot touch them or name them ; they are here, there, on the right hand, on the left hand, around us, above us, never sleeping, always watching. Against these thou dost call us to do battle ; but thou dost call us to put on the armour which thou hast thyself provided, and being clothed in that steel of heaven, we may go on from conquering to conquer, slaying mightily and completely all evil forces and winning the Lord's battles in the Lord's great strength. Thine eye is upon us ; it melts with compassion, it gleams with complacency, and if now and again it is bright with anger, we know the justice of the indignation, for we have sinned and done evil in the Lord's sight. We come to thee to find pardon, and through pardon to enjoy peace—yea, to begin the eternal Sabbath of the heavens, the calm of eternity, the peace which passeth all understanding. Thou wilt not disappoint us ; if we have made any effort to come to thine house, thou wilt doubly reward us. No man can serve God for nought. If we have put ourselves to any inconvenience, thou wilt surely magnify thy grace towards us, and send a plentiful rain of blessing upon thirsty hearts. Pity us in all our littleness and weakness. Remember that our days when they are all counted are but a handful which a child might carry ; and remember that we are made out of the dust of the ground, and that the dust still claims much of us. Remember the difficulty of life : its daily burden, its certain care, its sorrows, so heavy and bitter. Remember the deaths which have bereaved us, the losses which have made us poor the disappointments which have torn and stung our hearts ; and then let thy mercy come to us in no few, scanty drops of pity, but in great rains of compassion, and let thy heart be moved towards us in all tenderness and grace. But why should we argue with thee, or plead with thee as if thou wert reluctant ? The willingness is upon thy side ; thou dost wait to be gracious. Again and again, amid all our peevish reasoning, thou dost remind us that if thou didst not spare thine only Son, but freely gavest him up for us all, how much more wilt thou with him also freely give us all things. We forget the love of the cross, and therefore we doubt the love of the providence. The Lord forgive us Amen.

1 Samuel ii. 17.

"Men abhorred the offering of the Lord."

THE SONS OF ELI.

ELI was high-priest of the Jews when the ark of the Lord was in Shiloh. His two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the Lord. Their office was holy, but their character was corrupt. They touched sacred things with unworthy hands. "The sons of Eli were sons of Belial; they knew not the Lord." Their administration of the priestly office was characterised by the most rapacious selfishness. Hence we read "the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord." Their evil dealings were the subject of public remark and censure. Eli himself heard of these evil dealings on every hand.

"And he said unto them, Why do ye such things? for I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. Nay, my sons; for it is no good report that I hear: ye make the Lord's people to transgress" (vv. 23, 24).

The social consequences, as might be expected, were dreadful. "Like priest, like people." The fountain was impure, and the stream was consequently defiled. "Men abhorred the offering of the Lord." Men were influenced by their leaders; the people were shocked by the priests. Forms remained; sacrifices were offered; ceremonies were observed. Yet the heart had lost its divine love; and religion, no longer the imperial force of the highest life, had become decayed and noisome. It should be observed, that this frank statement of priestly corruption is found in the book of God; it is not an enemy who says this. The inspired record is not a one-sided testimony: inspiration does not undertake to make out a case. We are plainly told in God's book that the priests became sons of Belial; that under the Urim and Thummim there were hearts agitated by the vilest passions; that mighty men sold their strength for momentary indulgence; and that wise men were caught in the snare of the fowler. It was not left for an enemy to reveal the blemishes of the nominally good; God himself tore off the mask

and probed the sore. This should never be forgotten by inquirers who love truth and yield to the claims of honour. It will not be forgotten by men who wish to know the reality of the case. Let it stand, therefore, first and foremost a ruling and determining truth, that throughout God's word God himself constantly reproaches, condemns, curses all evil ; finds out, lifts up, blesses and crowns with his approval all good. The moral tone of the Bible must ever be the Bible's most powerful vindication.

The incident shows but too plainly the vital difference between the spiritual and the official. Hophni and Phinehas were officially amongst the highest men of their day. They bore a holy name, they pronounced holy words, they were clothed in emblematic robes. Yet Hophni and Phinehas were men of Belial. The outside was beautiful ; the inside was full of corruption and death. "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips ; but their heart is far from me."

Is there not a lesson here to teachers of Christian truth ? It is possible for a man to have a pulpit, and to have no God ; to have a Bible, and no Holy Ghost ; to be employing his lips in uttering the eloquence of truth, when his heart has gone astray from all that is true and beautiful and good ; at the very moment his lips are fired by the words that ought to have converted himself, his heart is not in his work, it is wandering far off yonder, buying and selling and getting gain, sucking in poison where it ought to have extracted honey, making the word of God of none effect, and causing the people to blaspheme and alienate themselves from the Most High !

Is there not a lesson here to professors of Christ ? We bear the holy name, and men have a right to expect the holy deed. We are to know a discipline that is more than decent, more than socially irreproachable. We need instruction upon the great question of spiritual discipline. When a man who professes to know Christ is found drunk in the streets, we expel him from the Church, and call that discipline ; when a man is convicted of some heinous crime, we cut him off from the fellowship of the

Church, and call that the discipline of Christian fellowship. It is nothing of the kind; that is mere decency. There is not a club in the world that cares one iota for its own respectability that would not do the same thing. Ours is to be Christian discipline. When Christian discipline comes into play amongst the priests and the professors of Christ, when the covetous man shall be blown away by a whirlwind of righteous indignation; and the man who spoke but one unkind word shall be seen to be a murderer, and shall be driven from the circle of God's people—who then can stand? Where are Christians, if such be the rule? If an unholy thought be lust,—if the turn of an eye may be practical blasphemy,—if the momentary entertainment of an evil thought, the flash of an evil passion,—if that be held before God to be crime incipient, crime in the germ, crime in reality—who then can stand?

The accusation does not come from an enemy. We are not entitled to say, "It is a foe who speaks, therefore we heed not his calumnious words." God himself brings charges against his nominal Church. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate;" "having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." Unto the wicked God saith, "What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" So the indictment comes with irresistible force, and we who best know ourselves are dumb before God.

Yet even here is a mystery,—a strange and wondrous thing. Hophni and Phinehas, officially great and spiritually corrupt; minister after minister falling, defiling his garments, and debasing his name; professor after professor pronouncing the right word with the lips, but never realising it in the life. Such is the history of the Church. In the face of all this, God still employs men to reveal the truth to other men, to enforce his claims upon their attention. Instead of in a moment of righteous anger sweeping the Church floor, so that not a footstep of man might remain upon it, and then calling the world around him, and speaking personally face to face,—he still employs men to

teach men, to "allure to brighter worlds and lead the way." We have this treasure in earthen vessels. We are called upon to bear testimony concerning truth,—though we are weak, blundering, incomplete, and very foolish,—though we hardly ever say one sentence as we ought to say it, though we preach a noble doctrine and then throw it down by an ignoble life. Yet God hath not withdrawn that comfort from us. He still says, "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard." He still says to Peter—with the scars all upon him, unhealed, and never to be taken away, memorials of a great apostasy—"Feed my lambs, feed my sheep." He still says to the men who forsook him and fled, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature." It is not an indication of our weakness when we are called to that daily continual trust, without which neither high-priest nor doorkeeper is safe, the fervent eternal prayer, "Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe."

The incident shows the deadly result of corruptness in influential quarters. All quarters, indeed, are influential; yet some are known to be more influential than others, therefore we adopt this form of expression. The priests were sons of Belial. What was the consequence? The people abhorred the offering of the Lord. The minister is a bad man. What is the consequence? His character is felt through all the congregation. Men laugh at his speech, jeer at his arguments, and return his persuasions to his own hollow heart. We are commonly advised to consider what is said, rather than look at the person who says it. We should ask, What is the doctrine? not, Who is the preacher? This advice is partly sound, and partly fallacious,—fallacious because superficial and incomplete.

We should remember three things in connection with this advice. First: The natural tendency of men to religious laxity and indifference. This makes us glad of any excuse to move further in that direction. Men are not naturally looking out for spurs and encouragements in the way of righteousness, self-crucifixion, and self-discipline. Their nature rather seems to say, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die." We eagerly snatch at anything that will afford us a momentary—though we

know it to be unsound—justification of laxness, indifference, and even contempt of religious duty and service,

We should remember secondly : The effect of insincerity upon doctrine. Sincerity is itself an argument. Men who hear us, look for sincerity in us ; otherwise, they have a right to say, "This man cannot teach the true doctrine, if in teaching it day by day he is continually hypocritical, insincere, unaffected by his own speech." Take some very high theory about the business, and we may be contradicted. But remember what Christian doctrine is ; then you will see that the moment it enters into the hearer's mind that the speaker is insincere, that consideration has of necessity a powerful and legitimate influence upon the doctrine. Is it possible to speak the truth with a liar's heart ? We know that we are to hear what men say who are in Moses' seat, yet not to do as they do. We know that, speaking ideally and abstractly, we ought continually to distinguish between truth and the speaker of truth, when his character is corrupt and inconsistent with his speech. At the same time there is a sense, profound and terrible, in which a man may be answering his own doctrine, overturning his own argument, and writing folly upon his own philosophy. If his lips pronounce the truth, if his heart contradict it, and his life blaspheme it, what wonder if men—who have a natural tendency towards religious indifference—should believe the life and deny the teaching !

Then we should remember thirdly : The peculiarity of moral teaching in requiring personal illustration. Men cannot understand merely theoretic morals ; they must have them personified ; they must have them taught by incarnation ; and be illustrated in daily life. The artist may teach you to paint a beautiful picture ; yet he may have no regard for moral truth. His non-regard for moral truth may not interfere, so far as you can see, with his ability and earnestness as a mere artist. You may go to learn a trade, and your chief in business may be able to teach you so completely as to give you a position in the commercial world, useful, influential, and profitable ; yet that man may tell lies every hour of his life, may break all the commandments of God, and in doing so he may not affect his ability to teach

your trade, or artifice, or profession. It is not so in the Church of God. A man's character is his eloquence; a man's spiritual reality is the argument that wins in the long run; the soul afire with God's love; the life that brings out in their beautiful and impressive relief God's exhortations,—these are the things that are most logical, most poetical, most pathetic, most persuasive.

The lesson is to Churches. What are we in our corporate capacity? Are we holy? If not we are helping to debase and ruin the world; we have taken God's leverage to help to undo God's work! The lesson also applies to heads of houses. If the father be the only bad character in the family, how then? It is hard work for the sons to be fighting always against the supreme influence of the house. How if the father of the family be continually sending out of him vicious, blighting influences, corrupting young life and chilling young hope? It applies to principals in business; it applies to leaders of all kinds. In proportion to the volume of our being and the elevation of our position is our power to extend hurtful influences upon the circles that are round about us. The terribleness of a moral leader falling! The awfulness of a standard-bearer dropping down! Well may men cry, "Howl, fir tree; for the cedar is fallen." Is there no solemn call to preachers, teachers, heads of families, principals in business, leaders of circles, great or small? When one man falls he may jeopardise a whole community. There are men who can fall, and their falling seems to produce but very little vicious influence upon society. There are other men so eminent in position, so established in reputation, whose falling would seem to bring down the pillars of civilisation, would seem to bring down the very fabric of God's Church! Herein is another mystery. When priests fall, and ministers play the coward and the liar, and heads of houses eat of the forbidden tree, and influential men go astray,—yet even then God interposes for the truth; he saves in society the redeeming element, hands it on from the unworthy to the successor who may be more worthy. Thus he preserves the light of the world and the salt of the earth. So God never wants a generation to bless him; the Redeemer has always near him some who hold his name dearest of all!

On the other hand, we cannot admit the plea that bad leaders are excuse enough for bad followers, when that plea is urged in relation to Christian teaching and life. Nor can we allow that exceptional inconsistency should vitiate the whole Church. There are some persons who are only too glad to avail themselves of this plea. The bad man will say, "Why should I care about religious truth or religious observance, when ministers themselves are false to their own doctrine? Why should I call upon myself to be consistent and true?" First, such a theory is inadmissible everywhere else. Why, then, should we allow it to affect the Church? There is not a circle in the world where such a theory would be thought tenable for a moment. Why then should we apply it in the highest spiritual relations? We go into an orchard and point to one piece of blemished fruit, and say, "Because there is a blemish upon that piece of fruit the whole orchard is decayed and corrupt." Who would believe it? There can be found a light coin in every currency in civilisation. Suppose we took up a standard coin under weight and said, "Because this is not of the standard weight, your whole currency is defective, and, as a nation of financiers, you are not worthy of trust." Who would believe it? We find a man who turns commerce into a species of gambling, and because so found gambling, we say, "The commerce of Britain is founded upon an illegitimate basis, and is not worthy of a moment's consideration." Would you think that sound reasoning, or a fair and noble method of dealing with such questions? Yet this is exactly how many persons deal with the Church of God. They say, "Look at Hophni and Phinehas; look at the minister who fell; look at the Church officer who was expelled from Church fellowship because of his dishonourableness and untruthfulness." Because of these exceptional cases they argue that the doctrine is wrong, that every Christian exhortation is a word that ought to be unheeded.

Secondly, such a theory is instantly destroyed by the fact that Jesus Christ is the Head of the Church. We do not say, "Look at Christians." We say, "Look at Christ." It is to Christ that we appeal continually; and in that appeal is our strength as Christian advocates or expounders of Christian truth. When a

man says, "Look at the minister," we say, "Look at the Master!" When a man says, "What do you call this?" we say, "We call it a copy: yonder is the original—look at that!" When we are told that Christian professors are very unstable and inconsistent, we say, "True; but they are not bad because of their Christianity, but because of their want of it." Find in Jesus Christ one instance of selfishness; find in him one moment's wandering from the right way; point out in his speech one unhallowed word or one ungenerous dishonourable expression. His life is before you! Be just and true and manly and right! Find in Christ's life one thing upon which you can lay your finger and say, "This is unholy," then you may pray God's lightnings to strike his Church and consume that which bears his name. When will men look at Christ, and not at Christians; at the sun, and not at the little taper? When will they look at the Redeemer, and not at the half-educated, incomplete, struggling, and oft-blundering Church?

Then, thirdly, such a theory is never urged but by men who are in search of excuses for their own corruptness. Who will undertake to repeat that on 'Change, and in the warehouse? That is a sermon in a sentence. Such a theory is never urged but by men who are in search of excuses for their own corruptness. A man says, "When that one who professed so much Christianity failed in business, I was on the point of giving up churches and chapels altogether." Doubtless that would be virtuous on his part. O fool, and slow of heart to believe the truth of God! When a man who is all skin and bone, who never felt volcanic fire in his heart,—never was led away by any dominating tyrannic passion,—hears of another kind of man straying from the right way, he instantly almost makes up his mind—what he is pleased to call his mind—to leave the Church. O fool, and slow of heart! Didst thou profess the name of the servant or the name of the Master? Didst thou enter the Church because of the high and illustrious example of the members of the Christian community, or because, convicted of sin, thou didst crawl to the cross and feel the healing effect of that falling blood? Where is reasoning—where is common-sense—when men say they have given up their Christian pro-

fession because some Christian professors are fickle, untrue, and inconsistent? We never yet knew a man who made much ado about Christian people's inconsistency who was not—more or less subtly, it might be, with more or less of self-concealment of purpose in the matter—seeking excuses for his own deficiencies, or seeking from his criticism of other people's vice to make his own virtue the more conspicuous.

It were nothing to kill a man,—stab him right through his heart and let him die. But when he is struggling towards light, towards God, and has to fight with all these demoniacal passions and influences round about, over which he seems to have little or no control,—when he just stumbles on the road and they point at him and say, “Ha, ha! that is your Christianity, is it?” that is thrice dying, that is intolerable pain! We know we are inconsistent, we know we are selfish, we cannot boast of ourselves. Yet it hath pleased God to be more merciful to us than men are. It is better to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men. When he smites it is that he may recover; when he puts his sword through a man it is that he may slay, not the man, but the disease that is in him; when he is sharpest with us there are tears in his eyes; when he punishes us most terribly, when he takes away the one ewe lamb, and barks the fig tree, and sends a blight on the wheat-field, and turns our purposes upside down,—it is that he may save the man. When men criticise us and are harsh with us, by reason of their incompleteness, their criticism often degenerates into malice. When they point a finger at us, it does not always indicate a fault, but oftentimes a triumph over an inconsistency.

We are not to be followers of Hophni and Phinehas. The priest is not God; the minister is not Jesus Christ; the professor is not the Redeemer of the world. We must, therefore, insist upon the honest investigation of great principles on the one hand, and specially insist upon the calm, severe scrutiny and study of our Saviour's own personal life and ministry. We have a written revelation. To that revelation our appeal must be made; to the law and to the testimony must be our challenge. As for those whose satire is so keen, and whose wit is so fluent when it is employed in

criticism upon Christian character, wherein they do it and are able to point out something in us that is wrong, let us receive the lesson with all meekness ; they may be right, and we may learn something from an enemy. It is lawful, according to an ancient maxim, to learn even from a foe. Wherein their criticism is the result of malice, or brief acquaintance with our character—seeing only edges and glints of us and not the whole nature—let us remember that our sufferings are not to be compared with the sufferings of Jesus Christ. When he was reviled he reviled not again, when he suffered he threatened not ; he gave his back to the smiters and his cheek to them that plucked off the hair. “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad : for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.” “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.” What have we suffered ? Who can show one blemish for Christ ? We may think a great deal of our little sufferings when we view them in themselves ; but when we write them out and put them in parallel columns with the sufferings of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be glad to draw them back again and put them away, and look upon ourselves as spoiled children. We may try them again in another parallel column with the sufferings of the apostle Paul, and the same feeling will return, and we shall desire to change the subject.

Blessed are they that are reviled for the sake of their goodness. Not many have attained that high nobility. We say the age of persecution is now gone. Alas, all ages seem to have gone ; there is nothing left but insipidity. The age of miracles—gone : the age of persecution—gone : the age of speaking with unknown tongues—gone : the age of the devil—gone ! It seems that we ought to be going too. Presently we shall be dying of weariness,—we shall be overcome by this intolerable insipidity. The age of persecution has gone, has it ? Why ? Perhaps because the age of godliness has gone !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, it is a fearful thing to fall into thy hands! Thy throne is established in righteousness and judgment. The liar and the evil person shall not live in thy sight; thou art angry with the wicked every day; thou givest no peace unto them; thou withholdest all enduring blessings from those whose hearts go astray from righteousness. Thou dost drive the priest from priesthood, the minister from his pulpit, the head of the house from his family circle. Thou drivest out the evil-minded man, thou scourgest those who know not thy purity and thy love, thou vindicatest the righteousness of thy name by terrible judgments in the earth. We come to thee as the God of mercy as well as of judgment. We are now on praying ground; we may now plead mightily with thee for the exercise of thy pardoning mercy, lest we too be condemned and carried in the whirlwind of thy just anger; God be merciful unto us, sinners! save us in the hour of temptation; deliver us when the enemy would carry us away captive at his will; and when the great enemy of souls would come in as a flood, do thou lift up thy Spirit as a standard against him. If thou dost hold us up we shall be safe; if thou dost loose thine hand from ours, behold, we cannot stand! Have us in thy holy keeping; establish our hearts in the precepts and statutes of all thy will, and grant that, having served our day and generation with all simplicity, trust, meekness, and strength, we may be called to enter into the rest eternal as thine own being! Amen.

1 Samuel ii. 33; iii. 18.

"And all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age."

"And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him."

THE HOUSE OF ELI OVERTHROWN.

WE have seen that Hophni and Phinehas were corrupt men, and that as a consequence the people abhorred the offering of the Lord. We have discoursed upon the doctrine that bad priests make bad people. We now come to the divine visitation of priestly unfaithfulness. Once and again we are permitted to see with startling vividness the Hand which rules, and in which is the rod of power. Now and again God puts aside all ministries and mediations, and shows us all the glory of his

personal presence and all the wonderfulness of his irresistible power. We are glad when he retires, for no man can see God and live. Better to have the ministry of the most inexorable, faithful prophet, who never spares the word of judgment or the stroke of the rod, then stand in the unclouded and blinding blaze of the divine glory. Men prefer sunshine to lightning. They are both, indeed, rays of the divine glory ; yet we feel safer under the ordinary daylight than under bolts of electric fire. Let us be thankful, then, that God comes to us through Eli, through human priests, and through man's ministry, being tempered, as it must be, by human limitations, rather than by bringing us face to face with himself, and pronouncing the word to us without minister or medium. At the same time we are made stronger, we are made tremblingly glad by occasional glimpses of his personality. Yet we are thankful that he puts a veil over his face, and communes with us by voices with which we are familiar. Hophni and Phinehas were evil-minded men ; Eli was afflicted with weakness which dipped down sharply towards wickedness ; and therefore God came out of his hiding-place to vindicate righteousness, to sweep the floor of his Church, and to use his great winnowing-fan.

Eli might have excited pity but for the misdirection of his amiability. There is nothing wrong in amiability, in paternal kindness, in fatherly forbearance and gentleness, within the limits of the household. Contrariwise, there is much that is beautiful and impressive and educational about such paternal administration. But no man may be amiable towards wickedness. The whole doctrine is found in that one sentence. Be amiable, kind, forbearing towards infirmity, natural defect, towards things that are of little or no consequence when compared with the verities of the eternal God. But when a man winks at an evil deed, he deserves the condemnation and wrath of God. When a man is tolerant of evil he himself becomes wicked. This is a doctrine which sometimes has severe application, and exposes a man to terrible reprisals ; because people who look at comparative virtue, and not at holiness itself, always have the *tu quoque* ready for any faithful prophet, for any light-speaking and rod-using minister of God. Be ye clean that bear the vessels of the Lord ! If we can keep our garments unspotted from the world we shall have

proportionate power over men ; though even then there will not be wanting censorious critics who will be quick with their malicious repartee, pointing at a speck as though it were a blot which even God himself could never wash out of our life. Eli was an easy-going indulgent old man ; he was more than that. Tell us that at his own fireside his children could trifle with him, mock him, and could turn him into a family joke. Well, it was a very naughty thing for them to do. But Eli was a priest, Eli was the high-priest of the Lord ; and when a man's character sinks below his office, he involves himself in complications of evil which ultimately ruin his life. The office requiring strength and character, which is distinguished by nothing but the most senile weakness,—when they get together you have a contradiction which involves terrible moral consequences.

In dwelling upon the overthrow of the house of Eli, we will look at the subject under two divisions,—personality and doctrine. There were two persons employed in connection with this communication of terrible intelligence to the old high-priest. The first is merely described as “a man of God.” So far as the page before us goes we have to deal with an anonymous communicant. Here is no great historic name ; here is no illustrious reputation to sustain the man's words. He steps out of obscurity, as it were, and is known by the imperishable name, “a man of God.” That is the one name that will do for all worlds, through all ages. You need not have “a man of God” described, ticketed, and detailed. When a man of God confronts you, he brings with him atmosphere and light and moral credentials which instantly show that he has been with Jesus and learned of him. There may be teachers who can analyse the character of a man of God. We prefer not to attempt any such analysis. Better let the character stand there, hear all he says, listen to his overpowering speech, and we shall soon know whether he hath learned his accent in the court of heaven. He was a terrible speaker ! Did ever mortal speech exceed in massiveness, in thunderous force, in terrific all-cleaving might, the speech which this anonymous messenger delivered to Eli :

“Wherefore the Lord God of Israel saith, I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever : but now the Lord

saith, Be it far from me ; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed. Behold, the days come, that I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. And thou shalt see an enemy in my habitation, in all the wealth which God shall give Israel : and there shall not be an old man in thine house for ever. And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart : and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age " (ii. 30-33).

That was a terrible speech to make to an old man whose life was all behind him, who was now tottering on the last edge ! It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ! Ministers of God are required to come up to this point of faithfulness, now and again ; to have to say these words, terrible as lightning at midnight, right to an old man, when nobody else is there to hear,—to thunder to one man,—to shake the universe round one poor old man ! It is nothing to preach to a crowd. Our words are so distributed and divided, and, where they are unpleasant, are so handed on from one to another and finally thrown out of doors, that the speaker incurs but little danger of rousing the malice and spite of his hearers. Therefore the ministry is a poor tame thing,—a noonday luxury,—something we like by the way and care nothing for. But when the man of God comes and talks to one auditor,—and when that auditor feels, by reason of his solitude, that every syllable is meant for him alone,—you go far to test the strength of a man's character and the extent of a man's moral capacity. Eli was a priest, the speaker was a man of God. Man first, priest second ; life original, office secondary. Eli was high-priest, and the man who confronted him was a man of God. There is something deeper in the human than the sacerdotal. Robbers and thieves have come to Christ's fold, and Christ said, "My sheep would not follow them." Sometimes the sheep are wiser than the shepherd. Let us have faith in the instincts of humanity, in the general judgment of an unbiassed congregation. Let us have faith in people, in humanity ; not in ephods and mitres and staves of office,—but in that divine, living, imperishable spirit which God has put into redeemed and sanctified beings. Surely this message was enough for one day. Who can bear such thunder from the morning even until the evening ?

The next messenger that came was a little child. This is how God educates us, by putting tutors on both sides, behind and before. You hear a man who tells you what to you may be evil tidings,—sharp, startling messages to your judgment and to your conscience,—and you say, “The man is a fanatic.” You walk away, and before you have got a mile further a little child gets up and smiles at you the same message,—says it in smiles, in tender looks, in trembling child-like tones,—and you begin to think there is something in it. You go further, and the atmosphere seems to be charged with divine reproaches and divine messages. So you go on, until the oldest, best, and stateliest men tremble under subtle, impalpable, all-encompassing, irresistible influences. There are some testimonies which are so terrible that they cannot be believed on the spot. Some men have such a way of speaking—piercing, crushing—that when they are heard the auditor says, “This cannot be so; it is an exaggeration.” So God hath appointed elsewhere child-priests, little prophets, young ministers, unexpected interpreters of his heart and will. When the thunder and the gentle breeze unite in speaking the same message men begin to open their ears to it—to cause their hearts to listen to the strange, the bitter, yet the most needful word. Very beautiful is this part of the story detailed,—the part, namely, which relates to Samuel, the little child about the holy place who did not know the Lord. Samuel had no acquaintance with God. That is a most important point to observe. Read the exact words of the narrative:

“Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, neither was the word of the Lord yet revealed unto him” (iii. 7).

Still it is right to be waiting about the temple; you never know what you may hear. Men do not go into the temple because they know all about God; they enter if haply they may get any hint about him, any initial lesson about that wondrous Being who carries all other life in his own eternal pulse. Let no man desist from attending the house of God; he may some day hear a message immediately from the Lord.

This incident brings before us some of the most solemn moments of life. Life is not one long holiday. Life is not to

be spent upon one continuous level. There are some single moments in our life which make us old. There are some visions, which are but the flash of an eye, yet they make us old men. Look at Samuel, for the first time hearing of God. Is it not a solemn moment when we get our first notion of the infinite? Can you recall your mental sensations or spiritual condition when you first began to feel that yonder distant, dim horizon was but a trembling, almost transparent curtain, and that just behind it, so to speak, lied God's eternity? After such a moment as that, a man can never, if he has made right use of it, fall back into the littleness and contemptibleness of the life that thinks the world a nutshell, that calls time all duration. Some have had these solemn moments in life; when they have heard a Voice they did not know, and from that moment have never ceased to hear it; it has been the sub-tone of all that has reached the ear, it has been in the hum of all nature, it has been softer than softest zephyr of the spring. A man is never great until he knows all about this solemnity. The child who hears a voice, naturally thinks it is a human voice. Can any voice be so human as God's? Thou canst not thunder with a voice like his; thou canst not speak in so fatherly or motherly a tone either. Herein is the incarnation mystery,—God always showing his power to talk humanly, and to shoot out the lightning of his word from human lips. God has always during the history of the world been incarnating himself.

Samuel is taught that there is a voice other than Eli's. The old man has still force enough left in him to speak this wondrously beautiful word to the bewildered child, groping about in the darkness, "When thou hearest the voice again say, Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." That is what we are called upon to do; to be listeners, receivers, mediums of God. Do we ever see beyond our own limited circle? Do we know that there is a world larger than our England: that over that little thimbleful of water, which we call the sea, there are other countries? It is a difficult thing for some Englishmen to believe that there is any other land; very difficult for an islander to believe in a continent. Yet really we know that there are other places besides England. Are there no other spheres than the

world which we call "the great globe itself"? There may be. Why then should we be compressing ourselves, minifying ourselves, and getting into the most microscopic compass? Why not pray for larger life, larger intellectual dominion, higher, sublimer moral sympathies? Why not, having infinitude around us, set ourselves as if we meant to take in as Guest and King the whole God? We shall never know what life is until we have passed this solemn moment which occurred in the history of Samuel, at the point to which we have now come. The non-religious man is not alive. How many are prepared to testify that they never knew what greatness was, what immeasurableness was, and what majesty was, until through Christ's life they had one peep into the incomprehensible eternity and infinity of God!

Now we can believe the man of God, who speaks the keen, cleaving word, or we can believe the gentle little Samuel, who comes and puts into monosyllables the thunders of the divine will. They are both the same; only some men cannot endure the man of God—he crushes them, he is a tyrant—an imperial, dominating man, in the way of whose arm there is death! Let such be thankful that they can hear the same message—not in a less noble music or more tender strain, so far as the man's intent is concerned—from children, from other ministers and interpreters of God.

With regard to the doctrine brought out in connection with these events, it is plain in the first place, that God requires holiness in all who serve him. Why were Hophni and Phinehas dismissed with divine reproaches? Because they were wanting in original thought? We now dismiss our ministers because they are not very original. We do not learn that Hophni and Phinehas were dismissed from the priest's office because they were wanting in vitality and freshness of brain power. Why were they dismissed? Because they were behind the age? The age! Oh, what a ghost that age is to some people. We do not read that Hophni and Phinehas were dismissed because they were behind the age,—but because they were corrupt men. Corruptness cannot be atoned for by genius. Gifts are no substitute for grace. Better be the poorest, slowest,

dullest thinker ; better be a man of stammering tongue, than be the most brilliant and gifted man who does not know what it is to be under the power of divine grace. Holiness, then, is the fundamental requirement in all persons who would interpret God and serve him in any department of the great ministry of his kingdom. Holiness is genius. Holiness hath keen, piercing eyes that see every filament of divine truth and holy communication to men. When the ministry is holy, when the Church is holy, when every man, high-priest and doorkeeper, is holy, then the world will begin to feel that there is something in it that is not of its own nature.

It is evident, also, in the second place, that all the covenants of God are founded upon a moral basis. "I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever." There is the bond, there is the covenant of God repeated by a servant. How, then, can Eli be overthrown? How can Hophni and Phinehas be dismissed from their office? "But now the Lord saith, Be it far from me." Is then the Lord fickle? Is he man that he should change, or is he the son of man that he should repent? "Be it far from me." Why? "For them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." Where is God's unchangeableness in the shape of trees and plants, in the order of the stars and the worlds, in any outside appointments, arrangements, and adaptations? Where do we find the unchangeableness of God? Only along the line of righteousness. When he speaks, he speaks upon a moral basis; all that he says is conditioned upon moral purposes. Hath he promised thee, O man, and art thou living upon that promise? Know thou, that the promise is always secondary; the character is primary—righteousness first. If the first archangel whom God summoned into his own solitude were to sin against him, he would dethrone him and banish him into outer darkness! Let us look at details, at outside arrangements, and see if this is fickleness on the part of Providence, or changeableness of disposition on the part of God. Go to the first line—the great line on which all true things are built, all lasting empires and monarchies are founded—and you will find that along the line of righteousness God never moves to the right hand

or to the left,—on from eternity to eternity, never a break or a deflection in the line of infinite righteousness !

In the third place, it is evident that some of the communications of God are at first very startling and terrible. Think of little Samuel making his acquaintance with the Lord through a speech like this ! Understand that at the beginning Samuel did not know the Lord ; that he received from Eli instruction as to his position ; that having assumed that position, the introductory words of the divine communication are these :—

“And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle” (iii. 11).

It is a child upon whose ear this awful message breaks ! It would have driven some men mad ! They could not have borne all that weight at the first ! God adapts his communications to those to whom they are addressed. We do not all come upon God at the same point. God's first message to man is not the same in every case. Herein, then, there is scope for charity—the charity that is just and noble when we are estimating the religious experience of men. You are not to say that, because others did not hear exactly as you heard, therefore they are wrong and you are right. When you heard God first he came to you along the trembling pathways of the thunder, and your religion is a sublimity. When your neighbour first knew God he heard him with much and intense listening,—it was a still small voice that stole in upon the ear of his soul, and his religion has always been a tune in the minor key ; he has been perhaps somewhat pensive, contemplative, and never quite lost the attitude of his first listening ; he seems to be listening still, and to be afraid lest a footfall should break the continuity of the divine message. When another first met God he came to him through the process of argument : the man was broken down by sheer force of reasoning, so far as his intellectual positions were concerned ; he saw his theories and speculations broken down, blown away, pulverised, and scattered on the flying winds ; and his religion has been logical, argumentative, propositional ; and whenever he has gone to hear a minister, he has stopped the minister at every sentence to say, “Prove it.” So God comes to us in different

ways. We are not to judge one another by our own standard, but let every man show by the clearness and simplicity and nobleness of his life, whether or not he has had a communication from God.

We have spoken of holiness,—a word we can but dimly understand upon the earth. One day we shall recollect the sun as a poor pale beam that we could just see with, by using our eyes very sharply and putting our hands before us lest we should fall over something. One day we shall think of our professed sanctification as a poor morality. But as to holiness, the question is asked by many anxious hearts, How is this holiness to be had? In one way. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin." There is "a fountain opened to the house of David for sin and for uncleanness." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thought, and let him return unto the Lord, and he will abundantly pardon." That is the only answer. Some ministers of Christ have been saying that for twenty-five years, for forty years, and they can find no better thing to say. It is the same in every ministry, to whatsoever part of the great universe of truth we may go. If any man asks how to get up there, we have to point to the old way,—the Cross of Christ; to Christ, who tasted death for every man; to the atonement made by the Lamb of God! We want no other way. We never feel the need of any other way. When we have tried any other path, we have only had to be brought into some deeper sorrow and more bitter agony to call out after the living God to help us back again to the old way of the cross. He who walks that road finds his way to heaven!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, we have transgressed against thy covenant, and thy commandments have often been of none effect in our lives. We have forgotten God. We have lived in ourselves; we have been our own law; we have been our own gods. Truly, thou hast been angry with us. Thou hast scourged us until our life has become a daily pain. Thou hast impoverished us until we have seen the emptiness and vanity of our own resources. Now take us to thine heart again. Come through the dark cloud of thy judgment, and in answer to our penitence speak comfortably to our souls. We seek thee only through the covenant which thou didst make with thy dear Son. We stand behind him. Our hearts are safe in the infinite security of his righteousness and compassion. Give us joy in thy presence,—yea, fill us with the peace of God! Amen.

1 Samuel iii. 11-14.

“And the Lord said to Samuel, Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. In that day I will perform against Eli all things which I have spoken concerning his house: when I begin, I will also make an end [completing it]. For I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth; because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not. And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not [assuredly not] be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever” [a sentence made irrevocable by an oath].

THE CAUSES OF ELI'S OVERTHROW.

OUR last subject was the overthrow of the house of Eli. So great an event as the overthrow of a consecrated house ought not to be allowed to pass without careful inquiry into its causes. It is the more important because of a statement in the second chapter of the book that we are now studying: “I said indeed that thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the Lord saith, Be it far from me.” If we once get the notion that God's covenants are not to be faithfully carried out on his part, our moral foundations are destroyed and our confidence is shaken. For this reason, let us pause at this great breach of a covenant supposed to have been eternal,

and ask how that breach came to be made. It must be noted that God himself annulled the covenant. Eli did not say that he wished for release from the bond. Eli did not complain of difficulty or incapacity. The word of rupture was spoken by God himself, thus: "But now the Lord saith, Be it far from me. Let the covenant which was made for ever between me and thee be far from me. I said the covenant was to be an everlasting covenant, and to-day I recall it. Thy house shall perish." We are shocked by such words. The conscience of man asserts a kind of right to have such words explained. Life would not be worth having but for profound and complete trust in God's honour. It were cruel on his part to lift us almost to heaven that he might dash us into the abyss of outer darkness! The covenant was made for ever, yet God annulled it! We pause, as earnest men having some regard for social honour, to know how an eternal covenant can be set aside. The case grows in difficulty, and, to the eye of the mere artist, it increases in dramatic interest as we call to memory the many points of excellence in the character of Eli. Can you find one vulgar sin in the venerable high-priest? He was a man of advanced life, and therefore he had had opportunities of displaying his real quality. He was ninety-and-eight years old; his eyes were dim, that he could not see; he had judged Israel forty years. What of his character? Why was he dispossessed of the priesthood? Was he a drunkard, an adulterer, a liar, a thief, a blasphemer? There is not a tittle of evidence to justify the faintest suspicion of the kind. Nay, more. We can give Eli still higher praise than this: for, after having carefully read his life, as it is detailed in this book, we see not why Eli might not stand most favourable comparison with many of the leading Christians of our day. We cannot see, looking at the page in the light of merely literary critics, where the great lapse was. We know not but that if Eli, as portrayed in the inspired book, were set up as the standard of determination, a great many would fall short of his lofty altitude. These considerations justify the interest of the question how Eli came to be dispossessed of the priesthood.

Look at his noble treatment of the child Samuel. He knew that Samuel was called by the Lord to occupy an official position

in holy places; he knew that Samuel was, at least in all probability, to succeed him in his sacerdotal functions. Yet what an absence of the usual elements of rivalry! When did he chide the young prophet? When did he superciliously snub the child? When did he flaunt all his own greatness in the eyes of the little one, and use his power as an instrument of terror, that Samuel might render him homage? Did he ever nibble at the character of Samuel? Did he ever try to reduce the importance of Samuel's probable position in life? Did he point out blemish after blemish in the child's character, and deficiency after deficiency in the child's gifts? It is becoming in rivals to traduce one another. If you cannot actually slay a man, yet it is permissible, by the rules of this honourable rivalry, to scratch him. Yet we find in Eli's treatment of Samuel nobleness, magnanimity, — want of all the little miserable tricks which are made use of by men who seek to enhance their own glory by diminishing the lustre of others.

Look at the unpriestliness of his tone when he talks to the child. Samuel came to Eli in the hour of darkness and said, "Thou didst call me." Eli said, "No, my child, I did not call thee." Samuel came again, and yet again. What did Eli do, knowing that Samuel had heard a voice more than human? Did Eli say to Samuel, "Pay no heed to such voice, little child. I am the high-priest of God. If thou dost see a spectre or vision, or hear an unearthly voice or tone, be not led away superstitiously by these things; but come to me, and I will instantly tell thee all about it, and determine what thou hast to do"? That would have been the talk of a priest; that is the native accent of a true priest. Yet Eli said to the child, "It is God that calleth thee; go and speak to him face to face; stand before him and say, Speak, Lord; for thy servant heareth." Why, that was not priestly at all; that was putting a man face to face with the Eternal, and clothing the soul with responsibilities which never can be transferred.

Looking at this aspect of Eli's character, what reverence we feel for the old man! We see that he was a fine interpreter of the supernatural section of life. He was not self-obtrusive; he was

no mere priest ; he introduced men immediately to God ; he did not claim any power of exclusive or tyrannic mediation. Look, again, at the submissiveness of his tone when his doom was pronounced. When he was told that his house would be rooted up, that both his sons should die on one day, that the judgment of the Lord had set in against him and his successors, what did Eli say ? Remember, he was nearly a hundred years old ; his eyes were dim ; for forty years he had maintained a position of supremacy. Men cannot easily throw away the traditions and the social consequence of so long-continued an elevation. Yet when the old man heard his doom, he said, "It is the Lord : let him do what seemeth good in his sight." How few could have shown the same submissiveness, the same religious homage, under circumstances so terrible ! An earthquake shaking the foundations of our house,—a storm-cloud pouring out its flood upon our inheritance ! Yet Eli was no vengeful priest in that hour : he was no mere self-seeker in that terrible day. Even then, when the foundations were rocking under his feet, and all the surroundings of his life were full of tempestuous and devouring elements, he said, with an old man's tremulous pathos, "It is the Lord." Equal to, "Let God be true, and every man a liar ; he is Sovereign, I am servant ; whatsoever the Judge of the whole earth doeth shall be done in righteousness."

Then look at the man's interest in the ark of the Lord. When that sacred box was taken out into the battlefield and was captured by the Philistines, Eli's heart trembled for the ark of God. Down to the very last, we see that Eli was an intensely religious man, from whom God withdrew his covenant, and on whom he pronounced such severe judgments as these :—

"I will cut off thine arm, and the arm of thy father's house, that there shall not be an old man in thine house. . . . And the man of thine, whom I shall not cut off from mine altar, shall be to consume thine eyes, and to grieve thine heart : and all the increase of thine house shall die in the flower of their age" (ii. 31, 33).

We would, therefore, repeat with fervour and with emphasis, that the conscience of universal man asks : "Lord of heaven and earth, is this right ?" In looking at the failure of Eli

as involving a moral question between the Creator and the creature, we are prepared to teach that the obligations of character must always control the obligations of covenants. All God's covenants are founded upon a moral basis. A covenant is but a form; a covenant is merely an arrangement, if it be not established upon moral conditions. There are circumstances in which God's faithfulness and God's unchangeableness are seen, not in fulfilling, but actually in the annulling, of covenants. God will never maintain the letter at the expense of the spirit. There is a pedantic morality amongst men which says, "The bond must be kept to the letter," and which cares nothing for the spirit of the engagement. God's morality is not a morality of ink and seals and witnesses. It involves life, spirit, motive, purpose. Were God to keep to the letter at the expense of the spirit, he would be no longer God. His unchangeableness is in his righteousness, not in his formality. Our confidence in him is this:—That he will set aside his oldest servants, his first-chosen men, his most princely vicegerents and interpreters,—he will utterly destroy them from the face of the earth, and hurl after them the written covenants he has made with them,—if they trifle with eternal truth, with infinite purity! To cover a corrupt life with the blessing of his approbation, simply because there is a literal covenant to be carried out, would be to deny every element which makes him God.

The answer, therefore, to the question which we put as from the conscience of universal man, is this: Eli, notwithstanding all these points of excellence in his character, is distinctly accused of moral defect. That has now to be proved. "Them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed." These words were spoken to Eli by the man of God, who came to him with the divine message. These words are pointless, if they do not imply that Eli had, by some means or other, brought himself into the list of those who despise God. Then again: "I will raise me up a faithful priest." These words are out of place, if they do not clearly suggest that, to some extent or other, Eli had been unfaithful to the divine vocation. Yet again: "I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth—not for some iniquity of which he

is unaware—I will bring up in his life iniquities which he himself has pointed out, as such ; which he knows to be wickedness in my sight, and out of his own mouth I will condemn him.” Now were God to keep his covenant in the face of such charges, the wicked would in time get advantage over him ; the hypocrite might, in the long run, be as God in the world. God shows his Godhead in the cancelling of covenants where there has been a decay of character. Understand, this is not a business covenant ; it is not a commercial bond ; it is not between one man and another ; it is between infinite righteousness and a human creature. We are not entitled to say that we may trifle with our human, social, commercial bonds, because there has been a lapse in character here or there. A commercial bond is a commercial bond. We are now considering covenants between God and man! These covenants cannot exist, except there be sympathy between the Maker and the creature. Moral sympathy, religious similitude : impair that, and of necessity the covenant is destroyed.

Viewed in this light, there are several impressive lessons urged by God’s treatment of Eli. First of all it is clear—and it ought to be made most distinct, because of a great practical delusion which exists upon this point—that it is not enough that there be many good points in a character. Character ought not to be a mere question of points at all. Character ought not to be viewed in sections and departments, in aspects and occasional moods. Character should have about it the distinctness of wholeness, entirety. Our goodness is not to be an occasional impulse or a transitory appearance of moral conscience and moral concern for others. Out of our character there is to stream continuous and beneficent influence. We lose when we can be talked about in sections. It is no compliment when we have to take out of a character three or four good points and say to those who look on, “Observe these ; whatever defects there may be in the character, do not overlook these redeeming points.” When we can talk so about ourselves and about others it is not a compliment, it is a sign of incompleteness. When our moral training is perfected we shall not have points of excellence ; our whole character will be massive, indivisible, and out of it will

go an influence that will constrain men to believe that we have been with God, and that we have imbibed the very spirit of his righteousness.

Eli was amiable. A great many mistakes are made about amiability. A man may be amiable simply through mere want of interest or force; he may be so constituted, that really he does not much care who is who, or what is what. He may have a senile grin—some may call it a smile—for anybody and for all persons alike,—a nice old man who never says a cross word, and never has a frown upon his face. That is not amiability. Here is a man who is naturally unamiable; he looks with a discriminating eye upon men and things; he is very passionate, fiery, self-asserting. Yet, by the grace of God, he is kept back; at times he shakes in the leash; he often seems as if he would break it and be away! Yet God's hold upon him is such that he speaks gentle words, restrains terms of indignation and wrath, moderates his rising passion. There,—though he cannot look very amiable, though he may have a grim face,—is the amiable man.

Eli had religious impulses. What then? There is a sense in which religious impulse may be but constitutional. It is more natural for some people to pray than others. It comes easier for some men to go to church than for others. We must not overlook the constitutional condition. We have heard a man say that there were two things in the world he could not tolerate; those two things were, sermons and lectures. We do not condemn the man; it is not worth while going into a rage over such men; by his very make one could see that sermons and lectures could not tolerate him. He would have been a mighty preacher who could have talked to such an auditor. Eli had religious impulses; but religious impulses are not enough. We have known a drunken man knock a Roman Catholic down because the papist said, "John Wesley is in hell." Was the drunken man a religious character? Certainly not; but he had religious emotions, impulses, sensibilities, and even when he was intoxicated, he would have preferred a hymn to a ribald song. Let us clearly understand, therefore, that mere religious sensibility, religious

impulse and religious susceptibility, must not be understood as proclaiming and certifying sound religiousness of character.

Eli treated Samuel without official envy or jealousy. So far so good. We commend Eli for abstinence from such interference with Samuel, and criticism of the child as would have been small and contemptible in one occupying the lofty position of the high-priest of the Jews. But absence of envy may come of mere easy good-nature. There are men in the world who do not care one pin-point who is at the head of affairs. That is not magnanimity; that is not nobleness. This is nobleness: the man who wants to be at the head of affairs himself, and feels considerable consciousness that he would be able to sustain the position; he longs for it, works for it, hopes for it day and night. Yet, there is a young man put above him, set on the chief seat, and he himself is kept down. It would be natural for that man to shake an angry hand in the face of his successful rival. Yet, by the grace of God, he says, "I bid thee God-speed." He says it perhaps with some difficulty; it does not escape him with that roundness and fervour of tone with which it would escape another man; but he does say it—says it from the heart, and the very reluctance of the speech is a sign of its sincerity. That is the man who has, by the power of the Holy Ghost, subdued the devil of jealousy and triumphed over the fiend whose name is envy!

The second lesson that is urged upon us by this view of Eli's position is—that divine discipline is keen—intensely spiritual. We have asked, Can you point to any vulgar sin in the high-priest? The inquiry is, Can you point out any vulgar sin in Eli? Sin is not measurable by vulgarity. Some men seem incapable of seeing sin until it clothes itself in the most hideous forms. Forms have nothing to do with sin. Sin is sin before it takes form. Herein we see the keenness, the spirituality of divine discipline. Herein, the Church, as we have already said, fails in its purely spiritual mission. A man is expelled from the Church because he has been discovered drunk. We cannot call that Church discipline. It is simple decency, common respectability; it is not Christian discipline. Christian

discipline would have applied itself to the man when he was longing for the drink; when he was drunk in his soul, before he touched the accursed cup. A man is expelled from the Church because he has committed manslaughter. That is not Christian discipline; that is legal discipline, magisterial discipline. Society will expel him. The Church should have expelled him when he was angry without a cause; when it was known that a bad passion had raged in his heart, and he had spoken some unkind, ignoble word. At that point,—invisible, impalpable, subtle, known only in all its significance to God, and understood only by those who understand the righteousness of law as revealed by God,—at that point Christian discipline would have interposed and asserted the law of right. The Church cannot have discipline except in its most common forms. Discipline would destroy the Church. Discipline would empty every pulpit and disband every Christian assembly if applied in all the keenness and intensity of its divine spirituality. Then let us regard the Church as an hospital; let us regard the Church as an infant school; let us regard the Church as striving after, not as having attained, the fulness of the divine idea; and having come to that conclusion respecting the visible Church of Christ, let us have compassion on some, making a difference—let us be charitable one towards another.

See further, in this case, the terribleness of God's displeasure. "I will do a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle. I have told him that I will judge his house for ever for the iniquity which he knoweth. I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever." These are terrible words. Yet, if they were less terrible we should have less confidence in God. If any one could be more terrible than God, we should not worship him. The measure of his love is the measure of his wrath; the height of his mercy is the height of his judgment. Terrible is a bad man's fate! He cannot elude God. He may have success; but in his very success he will find a sting which will inject poison into his life, and destroy sweet, profound, refreshing rest! He who starts to war against God, starts on a war the end of which is known from the beginning.

We would that this doctrine could follow us all through our life. We do not invite men to accept Christ because there is a terrible pain following the course of unrighteousness. That is not preaching the Gospel. We do not desire to dwell upon the punishments that befall a bad man with any wish of drawing him from his course because of those punishments. That kind of teaching we have never been able to adopt. But this we do teach distinctly, that the bad man has a painful course before him. Do not leave it on that account! The serpent shall bite you and the adder shall sting you, but do not give it up on that account! The wild beast shall shut his jaws upon you, but do not be righteous on that account! The earth will not have you, the sea will not cover you, hell will not burn you, but do not come to Christ on that account! Be a man; "be a hero in the strife!" We do not urge that men should be good because God will lay the hand of judgment upon them. No man would turn on that account. But the way of the transgressor is hard; he is making a hard pillow for his head. Be he high-priest or doorkeeper; be he mighty in gift or obscure in talent,—God will not spare him. If judgment begin at the house of God, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? "I the Lord am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Having started the stream, you cannot dam it back!

What, then, have we to leave our study with these hard words? No. Jehovah says: "When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; if he turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right, none of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he shall surely live." So, then, our "song shall be of mercy and judgment." Penitence is the one condition on which human souls can find God: repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." What tuneful words—words that shine upon our life like angels sent down from heaven!

We have all sinned : "there is none righteous, no not one." Were God to set his mark upon one sin in a thousand and judge us for it, who could stand before him ! But we go to Jesus Christ, God the Son, Messiah,—God ; and we find our infinite security in the fulness of his righteousness, and in the worthiness of his all-prevailing mediation.

SELECTED NOTE.

Eli (*raised up*) was high-priest of the Jews when the ark was in Shiloh (1 Sam. i. 3, 9). He was the first high-priest of the line of Ithamar, Aaron's youngest son. This is deduced from 1 Chron. xxiv. 3-6. It also appears from the omission of the names of Eli and his immediate successors in the enumeration of the high-priests of Eleazar's line in 1 Chron. vi. 4-6. What occasioned this remarkable transfer is not known—most probably the incapacity or minority of the then sole representative of the elder line ; for it is very evident that it was no unauthorised usurpation on the part of Eli (1 Sam. ii. 27, 28). Eli also acted as regent or civil judge of Israel after the death of Samsor. This function, indeed, seems to have been intended by the theocratical constitution to devolve upon the high-priest by virtue of his office, in the absence of any person specially appointed by the divine King, to deliver and govern Israel. He is said to have judged Israel forty years (1 Sam. iv. 18). The Septuagint makes it twenty ; and chronologers are divided on the matter. But the probability seems to be that the forty years comprehend the whole period of his administration as high-priest *and* judge, including, in the first half, the twenty years in which Samson is said to have judged Israel (Judg. xvi. 31), when some of his civil functions in Southern Palestine may have been in abeyance. As Eli died at the age of ninety-eight (1 Sam. iv. 15), the forty years must have commenced when he was fifty-eight years old.

Eli seems to have been a religious man ; and the only fault recorded of him was an excessive easiness of temper, most unbefitting the high responsibilities of his official character. His sons, Hophni and Phinehas, whom he invested with authority, misconducted themselves so outrageously as to excite deep disgust among the people, and render the services of the tabernacle odious in their eyes. Of this misconduct Eli was aware, but contented himself with mild and ineffectual remonstrances, where his station required severe and vigorous action. For this neglect the judgment of God was at length denounced upon his house, through the young Samuel, who, under peculiar circumstances, had been attached from childhood to his person (1 Sam. ii. 29 ; iii. 18). Some years passed without any apparent fulfilment of this denunciation—but it came at length in one terrible crash, by which the old man's heart was broken. The Philistines had gained the upper hand over Israel, and the ark of God was taken to the field, in the confidence of victory and safety from its presence. But in the battle which followed, the ark itself was taken by the Philistines, and the two sons of Eli, who were in attendance upon it, were slain. The high-priest, then blind with age, sat by the wayside at Shiloh, awaiting tidings from the war, "for his heart trembled for the ark of God." A man of Benjamin, with his clothes rent, and with earth upon his head, brought the fatal news ; and Eli heard that Israel was defeated—that his sons were slain—that the ark of God was taken—at which last word he fell heavily from his seat, and died (1 Sam. iv.).

The ultimate doom upon Eli's house was accomplished when Solomon removed Abiathar (the last high-priest of this line) from his office, and restored the line of Eleazar in the person of Zadok.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thy presence overfloweth all things. All things are naked and open to thine eyes. If we take the wings of the morning and flee unto the uttermost parts of the earth, behold, thou art there ! Thou art higher than all height, lower than all depth, and behold, none can take the measure of the breadth of thine infinitude. We come before thee with a song of mercy and judgment ; for whilst thou art a terrible God—and it is a fearful thing to fall into thy hands—thy tender mercies are over all thy works. Thou renewest our strength in compassion ; thou upholdest us by thy loving-kindness ; and every day thou dost vindicate thy government to us, not by the greatness of thy power, but by the tenderness and persuasiveness of thy love. We have halted in the midst of worldly pursuits and ordinary engagements, that we might bow the knee to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus ; that we might pour out our song of thankfulness, and renew our spiritual vigour by waiting patiently and lovingly upon God. May this hour refresh us exceedingly upon our earthly pilgrimage. May our strength be recovered ; may our peace be augmented ; may our hope be brightened ; may our whole life be brought into truer harmony with thine ! Dry the tears of our sorrow. Be pitiful to us by reason of our manifold infirmities. Give to us all the fulness of redeeming love, and pardon our sin, for it is great. Wash us in the precious blood of the Lord Jesus, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. Whom thou hast pardoned, do thou also sanctify. To this end pour out upon us the gift of the Holy Ghost, that he may reign in our understanding, control our will, purify our affections, and bring our being into entire subjection to all thy purposes. May there be nothing in us upon which thou canst not look with approval. Sanctify us in body, soul, and spirit. Abide with us ; reign in our life ; stablish thy kingdom in our souls ; put down every rival. Reign thou whose right it is ! Amen.

1 Samuel iv. 3.

“ Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies.”

THE ARK OF GOD.*

IN order to understand the full import of these words, we must carefully study the idea which the ark of the Lord was intended to represent. The twenty-fifth chapter of the Book of Exodus gives a most minutely detailed account of the making o

* For a complete discussion, see vol. ii., p. 205.

the tabernacle. God gave Moses a special description of the proposed sanctuary. He did not consult Moses, nor did he make suggestions which Moses was to submit to the consideration of the people of Israel. God laid down the whole plan, and no more left anything to be settled by the taste of Moses than he left Noah to determine the colours of the rainbow. As he said to Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth?" so he might have said to Moses, "Where wast thou when I designed the tabernacle?" There was not a ring, a knop, a socket, a coupling, or a pin which God himself did not specially design. Was it not like him? Is there anywhere one sprig of moss which owes its humble beauty to any hand but his own? As the tabernacle was built for the sake of the ark, and not the ark for the sake of the tabernacle, it becomes most important to know what the ark was, and what spiritual meaning the symbol was intended by Almighty God to signify. We read in the holy word: "Thou shalt make an ark; thou shalt overlay it with pure gold; thou shalt make upon it a crown of gold round about; thou shalt put into the ark the testimony which I shall give thee; thou shalt make a mercy seat of pure gold; thou shalt put the mercy seat above the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee. And there will I meet thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel."

The ark is called by various names. In Exodus it is called the ark of the testimony; in Deuteronomy it is called the ark of the covenant; in the first of Samuel it is called the ark of the Lord; and in the same book it is called the ark of God. What was this ark? Looked at materially, the ark of the covenant was a box or chest, fifty-four inches long, about thirty inches broad, and about thirty inches high. The box was overlaid with pure gold. The lid or cover of the ark was called the mercy seat. Upon the mercy seat were two golden cherubim, one at either end, facing each other, and covering the mercy seat with expanded wings. At the mercy seat—the lid of this box—God promised to meet Moses and commune with him. Hence, God

was said to dwell between the cherubim. The ark contained the two tables of stone on which God had written the ten commandments. "I will write on the tables the words that were written on the first tables which thou brakest, and thou shalt put them in the ark." In the first of Kings we read there was nothing in the ark save the two tables of stone which Moses put there at Horeb. The ark was placed in the holy of holies; indeed it is called in the first book of Chronicles, "the house of the mercy seat."

Let us now stand beside that box and consider its meaning, that we may be prepared to consider the text. In the box you find the commandments of God. The box is not merely in the holy house,—it is in the holiest place of the holy house. In the very midst of that box you find only the written law of the Most High. Keep that picture before you, if you would understand the spiritual significance of the symbol. As with the box in the tabernacle in the holy of holies, containing the written law of God, so with creation to-day. The great moral idea never changes. The chest is destroyed, the golden cherubim may no longer be found; but the moral purpose, the moral intent, is the same now and for ever. Penetrate into the highest place in the universe—go higher than the clouds, higher than the sun, higher than the farthest star—pass, if you may, into the secret solitudes of God, where human strife and din are never heard—and there, at the very centre, in the great solemn heart of all systems and powers, you find,—What? The law of God! This is at once a terror and a security. The spirit of judgment quickens all creation. Out of everything there comes a fire which scorches the bad man's hand. Wherever a good man goes a blessing approves and confirms his steps. For a moment the bad man may seem to bend things according to his own will: but "the Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming," when "he shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night." Some men could not live but for this reflection. Life would be a constant temptation to them, unmingled with any element of mercy. It is something to know, and deeply to feel, that all things are bound together by law,—that at the heart of the universe there is a written statute and covenant. It gives steady-

ness to life ; it defines relations, rights, consequences ; it enables a man to view with composure all the flutter and dust of the little day, and to draw himself forward by the power of an endless life. This, then, is part of the teaching of the symbolic ark. In the holy of holies we find the sacred chest covered with gold, watched by the cherubim, and in that hallowed chest is hidden the law written by the finger of God. That law is subtle as life. You are assured of its presence ; you are encompassed by ■ mystery which is never withdrawn for a moment ; you cannot explain it ; you are punished when you resent it ; you are at rest when you obey it, your very liberty is but a phase of restraint !

Happily, this is but part of the teaching of the ark. Over the ark there is a lid. Very special were the instructions given to Moses respecting it. The lid was the mercy seat, the propitiatory. It was there—not on the tables of stone graven with the law of God—but on the lid, the covering of the ark, that God promised to meet Moses. Now see how the case stands when you put both sides of it together. There you have the sovereign, unchangeable, inexorable law of God ; and over it you have the covering of God's tender mercy. When we look at the law, we look at it through the mercy, because the mercy covers it. When the law comes to us, it comes up through the mercy, because the mercy overlies it. All law now comes to us through the mediation of mercy. "The Lord is good to all : and his tender mercies are over all his works." What then ? At the very centre of the human system we have law and mercy, righteousness and love, sovereignty and sacrifice. Creation says, "My song shall be of mercy and judgment." Society is not a chaos ; creation is not an aggregate of unrelated fragments. Amid all the din, confusion, stress, and upset of life, there is, at the heart of things, a law unchanging as God,—a mercy ever enduring, ever pitiful.

This brief sketch of the ark of the covenant, and its spiritual significance, will enable us to follow with intelligence the varying fortunes of Israel, which have ever been associated, more or less directly, with this ark. We want a book written upon the ark of the Lord. Seek out its history ; see what becomes

of the people according to their treatment of this ark; see how one little thing rules all things,—how the heart-beat palpitates to the extremities of the universe! We give this counsel to youthful students:—Make this your subject,—the ark of the covenant; its structure, its typified doctrine, its relation to the history of a nation, and the eternal principles which come out of this symbolical representation of God.

In the case before us, the Philistines had slain of the men of Israel about four thousand. When the people came into the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Wherefore hath the Lord smitten us to-day before the Philistines?" This is an inquiry which men should always put to themselves in times of disaster and failure. "Why has God withdrawn me from the crowd and made an invalid of me, and shut me up in this shaded chamber? Why has God sent a blight upon my wheat-fields and olive-yards, so that there should be no produce? Why hath God barked my fig tree and taken away from me my one ewe lamb—spoiled the idol of my love? Is there not a cause?" So far, Israel was acting upon a principle of common sense. Every effect has its cause. Four thousand dead men of Israel are lying upon the field, slaughtered by the sword of the Philistines. Why? Admire sagacity, common sense, wherever you find it.

But observe what a mixture is presented by the text. "Let us," said the elders of Israel, "fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hands of our enemies." The ark had been at Shiloh from the days of Joshua, during the ministry of all the Judges. And now suddenly the leaders of Israel, with four thousand dead men lying about them, say, "Let us fetch the ark." They brought the ark, and when the ark of the covenant came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again! The Philistines said, "What is this? they are bringing their god into the field!" and the Philistines trembled. Notwithstanding this, the Philistines gathered together their courage, came against Israel, and Israel was smitten, and the ark of God was taken.

There must be some lessons here. Learn that the formal is

useless without the spiritual. There is the ark, made as God dictated,—a sacred thing: the law is there; the mercy seat is there. Yet Israel falls by the arms of the Philistines, and the sacred shrine is taken by the hands of the idolaters. There is nothing strange in this. The formal never can save men; the institutional never can redeem society. A mere observance, a ceremony, a form, can never touch the dead heart of the world. This is, emphatically, the day of bringing in arks, societies, formalities, ceremonies. You have in your house an altar; that altar will be nothing influential in your life if you have it there merely for the sake of formality. A man who cannot altogether throw away the traditions of his lifetime,—who hears, it may be, a parent's voice, saying to him in secret, again and again, "You promised me to do so and so,"—and in fulfilment of that promise he may snatch up the ark of the covenant, the law of God, hastily read through a few verses, shut up the book, and run away,—has he read the Word of God? He has insulted the divine testimony! True, he opened the book, he uttered to himself the words. Yet the service was no use in his life,—it was a mere formality. God will not be trifled with. Holy words will have no holy effect, if read in that manner.

Learn that religion is not to be a mere convenience. The ark is not to be used as a magical spell. Holy things are not to be run to in extremity, and set up in order that men who are in peril may be saved. The reasoning of the Israelites was subtle, but intensely selfish. "That it may save us." That sounds like a modern expression! To be personally saved, to be delivered out of a pressing emergency or strait—that seems to be the one object which many people have in view when identifying themselves with religious institutions, Christian observances and fellowships. We shall never have a robust, imperial piety till we get out of all these little, personal, narrow considerations, and identify ourselves with the very life of God—the infinite love of his eternal heart. We are, verily, more or less all guilty of this very thing. We have done as long as possible without the ark. We have gone a-warfare at our own charges; we have defied the hosts of the alien in our own strength; and when we have been worsted, overthrown, and

brought to the very brink of ruin, a lucky idea has seized us,—we have said, “Fetch the ark!” When the ark was brought, it was nothing but a wooden box: fetched by unworthy hands, its inspiration and glory ceased from it. “If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness.” Men have lived lives of practical atheism year after year; and when there has been a panic in the market, they have bethought themselves of old memories, early vows, first Christian oaths; and they have turned pious because there was a panic barking at them like a mad wolf,—they have begun to pray, and Heaven sent back their voice unanswered, unblessed! We must not play with our religion. We might guarantee that every place of worship would be filled at five o’clock in the morning and at twelve o’clock at night under given circumstances. Let there be a plague in the city—let men’s hearts fail them for fear—let them feel that all that is material is insecure—that nothing is real but the invisible and the spiritual—and they will instantly flock to churches and chapels by the thousand, and be very humble in the presence of God. That will not do! God is not to be moved by incantations, by decent formalities, and external reverence. He will answer the continuous cry of the life. The man who prays without ceasing may ever count upon the interposition of God.

We learn that the Philistines took the ark of the covenant. But though they had captured the ark, that sacred shrine made itself terribly felt. The Philistines took the ark to Ashdod, and put it into the house of their god Dagon. You see there was a good deal of religiousness in these men. They took away the box out of the battlefield; they unlocked the door where they kept their pagan god, and put the box in beside him. They set the Right beside the Wrong. What a night’s work there was! “When they of Ashdod rose on the morrow, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the earth before the ark of the Lord!” That might have been an accident. Perhaps in going into the house and moving the ark carelessly, they might have injured Dagon’s position, and so he might have come down, as it were, by haphazard. So they set Dagon up again, made his position secure and respectable, and left him in his solitude. Next morning they came, and Dagon was fallen upon his face to

the ground before the ark of the Lord; and the head of Dagon, and both the palms of his hands, were cut off upon the threshold. A terrible night's work there was in this case! What communion hath light with darkness? What fellowship hath Christ with Belial? When Right and Wrong come face to face, there must always be a sharp collision. When the Right goes down, as it does occasionally, it will be only as the ark of the Lord went down in the case before us, to plague its very captors and throw down the idol of their hearts. Would to God we could learn this doctrine,—that in some cases success is defeat! We need to learn this lesson,—that in some cases victory is loss, and that gain stings the winner night and day.

Here let us ask young readers to consider this part of the story diligently. We know of nothing equal to it in modern writing for excitement, for that singular romantic element which always spell-binds young readers. Read the history of the ark again. The Philistines took the ark, but they wanted to get clear of it, if anybody would take it away. What! you have won the ark,—keep it. They took it from place to place, and could make nothing of it; it was a torment to them. Last of all they said, "Let us send a present along with it, and by all means get clear of it!" Aye, it will even be so with ill-gotten results; with undeserved, unrighteously attained gain, be it wealth or influence, or what it may. It will not rest with the individual; it will say, "Send me away!" Judas took the thirty pieces of silver, but they had become so hot in his hand as to boil his blood, and he said to those who had bought him: "Take them away!" But the buyers said, "No!" The bad man has a hard lot of it; when he wants to get clear of his gain, he cries and begs that somebody will relieve him of his very victories. The Lord's sword is two-edged; touch it where you like, it cuts clear away to the bone!

Learn that the false relation of things always brings torment. Be it in the family: if the heads of the house are disagreed concerning great spiritual truths and realities, there cannot be peace in the house. Be it in business: one partner is a righteous man, and another is careless about moral obligations. There

cannot be peace; there may be success, sharp practice, keen fencing, and methods of doing things that look very successful; but there will be a stinging process, after all,—a sting that will pierce the heart and fill it with pain and anguish. You cannot rub right and wrong together, and make them cohere. It is so in a man's own heart. If half of the man is going one way and the other half wants to go the other way, the man's life is a most agonising, distressing struggle. Everywhere this great law is written. If it had never been spoken by Jesus, it might have been spelled out by scholars in the world's school,—“Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.”

The great spiritual application and the significance of the ark is undoubtedly Jesus Christ. We have no sacred chest; we have no box covered with pure gold; no tables of stone; no manufactured seat of mercy. All the great spiritual significance and application of these things we find in Christ. What the ark was to Israel, Jesus Christ is to the Church. In Jesus Christ we find law. Some Christians find that a difficult lesson to learn. They speak of Jesus as being all love, gentleness, and compassion, tenderness exceeding, and pity infinite. He was more than that. Whenever he spoke of law, he spoke of it as the Lawgiver. “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but this law must be fulfilled.” Jesus never trifled with equity, with righteousness, with probity, with moral obligation. Jesus Christ was not all mere sensibility. His was the sensibility that comes out of justice, righteousness, truth, purity, as well as tenderness, mercy, compassion. In Jesus Christ we find all the mercy of God! Observe that form of expression. By it we intend to signify that nowhere else can you find an element of mercy that is wanting in the character and spirit of Jesus Christ. He is at the head of all things. As the ark was in the tabernacle, in the holy of holies, so he is the Head over all things. He is highly exalted. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. He was not made for creation; creation was made for him. The ark was not built for the tabernacle, but the tabernacle was built for the ark. All things are in Christ and for Christ. One day this will be seen. He must reign until he hath put all enemies under his feet. The

last enemy that shall be destroyed is Death; and in the resplendent universe there shall be everywhere life, immortality. "He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied." When he is satisfied, who shall be discontented? When he says, "It is enough," who shall require any addition? When he who came up from unbeginning time—God the Son, lived and died, and rose again—suffered all Bethlehem, Gethsemane, Golgotha—when he shall say, "I am satisfied," who shall be able to suggest that one thing is wanting to complete the happiness of his redeemed family?

SELECTED NOTE.

"Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the Lord out of Shiloh" (iv. 3).—We cannot attempt to define the object of the ark. It was the depository of the Tables, and thus of the great document of the covenant. It seems also to have been a protest against idolatry and materialism. The mercy-seat was the place where God promised his presence, and he was, therefore, addressed as dwelling between the cherubim. On this account the ark was of the utmost sanctity, and was placed in the Holy of Holies, both of the tabernacle and of the temple. When the Israelites were moving from one encampment to another, the ark was to be covered by Aaron and his sons with three coverings, and carried by the sons of Kohath (Numb. iv. 4-6, 16). Joshua placed the tabernacle at Shiloh, and the ark does not seem to have been removed thence until the judgeship of Eli, when the people sent for it to the army, that they might gain success in the war with the Philistines. Yet the Israelites were routed and the ark was taken (1 Sam. iv. 3-11). After seven months, during which the majesty of God was shown by the plaguing of the inhabitants of each town to which it was brought, and the breaking of the image of Dagon, the Philistines hastened, on the advice of their priests and diviners, to restore the ark to the Israelites. These incidents and those of the coming of the ark to Beth-shemesh, where the people were smitten for looking into it, show its extremely sacred character, no less than does the death of Uzzah, when he attempted to steady it, on the journey to Jerusalem, an event which caused David to delay bringing it in. It is noticeable that it was carried in a cart both when sent from Ekron, and, at first, when David brought it to Jerusalem, though after the delay on the latter occasion, it was borne by the Levites in the ordained manner (1 Chron. xv. 11-15; 2 Sam. vi. 13). It was then placed on Mount Zion, until Solomon removed it to the temple. From the statement that Josiah commanded the Levites to place the ark in the temple, and to bear it no longer on their shoulders (2 Chron. xxxv. 3), it seems probable that Amon had taken it out of the sanctuary, or else that the Levites had withdrawn it from the temple then or in Manasseh's time, and the finding of the book of the Law under Josiah favours this idea (2 Kings xxii. 8; 2 Chron. xxxiv. 14). A copy of the Law was deposited with, or, as some suppose in the ark, and it seems that this was the copy from which the king was required to write his own (Deut. xvii. 18-20). But perhaps the ark was only removed while the temple was repaired. It is generally believed that it was destroyed when the temple was burnt by the Babylonians, and it is certain that it was not contained in the second temple.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY God, thou settest up and thou bringest down, as servants of thy Church and ministers of thy will, whom thou pleassest, according to a counsel we cannot understand. Thou hast made the stone which the builders refused the head stone of the corner; thou hast passed over the wise and the mighty, the noble and the great, and thou hast revealed thy secret unto babes. Who can resist the call of the Lord? Who shall answer, but with all his love, the appeal and challenge of the Most High? Impress each of us with a deep sense of personal responsibility, which can be measured only by the gifts which thou hast bestowed upon us and the opportunities with which thou hast blessed us. May the servant entrusted with five talents, and the servant entrusted with but one, each do his Lord's will with simplicity, diligence, and all the homage of the soul! Save us from all uncharitableness in regard to one another; from all envy and malice; from all censoriousness and unfriendliness. May each esteem other better than himself; may the strong bear the infirmities of the weak; may the aged prophets be gentle and tender towards thy young servants; and may those who are youthful in the Church of Christ have within them sense of veneration, confidence, and respect in regard to those who have borne the burden and heat of the day. Establish us all in the counsel and service of Christ. May we love the Saviour with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. May the supreme joy of our life be to uphold the rights of his crown and to explain the mystery of his cross. Let thy blessing now descend upon us, that we may have life more abundantly, that our peace may pass understanding, that our joy may be unspeakable and full of glory. Shed light where there is darkness. Send the delivering word to souls held in the captivity of the enemy. Turn those whose faces are turned away from the living God and the eternal light. Now may our hearts lift themselves up towards their Father in praise, in thankfulness, in hope! Amen.

1 Samuel vii. 3.

"And Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the Lord with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroth from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines."

SOLITARY POWER.

SAMUEL is now in full office. Eli died when the messenger told him that the Philistines had taken the ark. Up to this time we have had no express communication from Samuel him-

self. From pregnant sentences, here and there, we have known that he has all the while been moving in the right direction. The Lord was with Samuel, and did not suffer any of his words to fall unto the ground. "All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord." "And the Lord revealed himself unto Samuel in Shiloh." "And the word of Samuel came unto all Israel." These assurances indicate that Samuel, in his comparative obscurity, has been steadfastly moving onward according to the purpose of God. From this time we shall see more of him. His position in this chapter is most conspicuous, and his deeds are most instructive. Verily, in this case, the child was "father to the man." As prophet of the Lord, Samuel's will was supreme;—all the main features of the history derive their expression from the spirit of Samuel. There is authority in his word, there is inspiration in his encouragement, there is death in his frown. Under these circumstances you see how naturally we are led to meditate upon the profound influence of one life. Such is the subject. We shall develop it, by reviewing the three remarkable attitudes in which we find Samuel in the course of this chapter.

In the first place, look at the sublime attitude which Samuel assumed in relation to the corruption of the faith. Samuel distinctly charged the house of Israel with having gone astray from the living God; solemnly, with the pathos of a godly tone, with the solemnity of a righteous, indignant, yet pitiful heart, he said, "You have been guilty of high crimes and misdemeanours against the God of heaven; you have trampled underfoot your convictions and your traditions. You have bowed yourselves before the altars of forbidden gods." Distinctly, without reservation, without anything that indicated timidity on his part, he laid this terrible indictment against the house of Israel. In doing so he assumed a sublime attitude. He stood before Israel as a representative of the God who had been insulted, dishonoured, abandoned. His was the only voice lifted up in the name of the true God. It is in such cases that men show what stuff they are made of:—when they stand face to face with the crowd, and say, "You are wrong;" when they mount the popular whirlwind, and say, "Your will is moving in the wrong

direction,—it is corrupt, debased, utterly foul, and bad !” Is there a grander spectacle anywhere on the earth than to see a lonely man confronting a whole house or an entire nation, and upbraiding the whole community with a common apostasy—with a common determination to go down to darkness and death ? Samuel said, “You must put away Baalim,”—a plural word, which stands for no god in particular, but for all the progeny of false gods. “You must put away Ashtaroth,”—a plural word, which signifies no goddess in particular, but the whole company of feminine idols. “That is what you must do.” We find sublimity in the attitude, imperial force in the tone. How did Samuel’s influence come to be so profound upon this occasion ? The instant answer is, Because his influence is moral. Moral influence goes to the heart of things. He who deals with moral questions deals with the life of the world. Any other influence addresses itself to affairs of the moment ; all other influences are superficial and transitory. He who repronounces God’s commandments, and tells to the heart of the world God’s charges, wields a moral, and therefore a profound influence. Sometimes we say that a man’s intellectual influence has been profound. There is a sense in which that is perfectly possible, and may be really and gloriously true. But the heart is further in the man than the intellect. He, therefore, who purifies the heart, brings the life up to the right altitude and inspires it with the right purpose, does a work to which there is no end ; it is abiding as God’s eternity, lustrous in its degree as God’s glory !

Herein is the supreme advantage of the Gospel. The Gospel of Jesus Christ does not come to attend to any diseases that are merely cutaneous ; the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not engage to settle questions that lie merely on the surface of society ; the Gospel of Christ does not undertake our local politics, and things that are little, contracted, and perishing. The Gospel of Christ lays its saving hand upon the human heart and says, “This is the sphere of my mission. I will affect all things that are superficial and local and temporary ; but I shall affect them indirectly. By putting the life right, I shall put the extremities right ; by making the heart as it ought to be, the whole surface of nature will become healthful and beautiful.” This is the supreme advantage

of the minister of the Gospel. A true servant of the Lord Jesus Christ has little or nothing to do, directly, with the petty, trifling, fussy controversies of the day. It is not his business to walk into heated committee rooms and to discuss, with all learning and profundity, transient parochial politics. The minister of Jesus Christ addresses man as man, and by moving the heart he moves the will; by enlightening the judgment, he elevates the life. Having done that interior, moral, everlasting work, there comes out of him, in all directions, the happiest influence in relation to things that are local and perishing. We shall fall from the great ministry, if, forgetting the universal, we give our strength to the particular. We need men in society who stand apart from the little fights, petty controversies, and angry contentions which seem to be part and parcel of daily life, and who shall speak great principles, breathe a heavenly influence, and bring to bear upon combatants of all kinds considerations which shall survive all their misunderstandings. Regard Samuel in this light, and you will see the sublimity of his attitude. He stands alone; on the other side of him is the whole house of Israel. It would be a much easier thing for him, viewed merely from the outside and in relation to the passing hour, to say, "We are all brethren; you have gone wrong, I must allow; but I do not think I should be harsh with you. Hail, fellows well met! let bygones be bygones, and from this day let us enjoy ourselves." But no man's will is merely personal when he speaks for God. Samuel would have no right to say, "I am setting up my little personal judgment and will against yours." He was the medium on which the infinite heart broke into language, and through which the infinite purpose caused itself to be heard in all the indignation proper to its outrage, in all the pathos becoming the infinite compassion of God! Herein, again, is the great influence of a moral teacher, a revealer of Christian truth. Whenever we hear a preacher who speaks the right word, we hear God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost; through his voice we hear the testimony of the angels unfallen; out of his words there comes the declaration of all that is bright, pure, true, wise, in the universe of God!

Now let us look at the holy attitude which Samuel assumed

in relation to the guilt of Israel. Samuel said, "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and I will pray for you unto the Lord." In the first instance his attitude was sublime; the lonely man speaking the charge of God to an apostate nation. In this instance his attitude is holy. Because having charged the people in the name of God, condemned them in the interests of righteousness, and called them to purity of worship, he says, "If you will gather yourselves together, I will pray for you." This is the secret of great influence: indignation,—calmness,—righteousness incorruptible and inexorable,—devoutness that stoops to pray for the fallen, the foul, the evil-minded, and the debased. Samuel was not borne away by anger and fury; he did not give way even to judicial vengeance. In the first instance he describes the corruptness of the case, points out the right course, exhorts the people to take that course instantly, and then he speaks these healing words: "If ye will do these things, and gather yourselves together to Mizpeh, I will pray unto the Lord for you." See the fulness of the meaning of such words as these, as used by such a man, under circumstances so distinctive and impressive! "I will pray unto the Lord for you." Then the highest man in the Church is but a priest, a prophet, an agent, an instrument. Not, "Gather all Israel to Mizpeh, and there I will pronounce the word of absolution for you." Samuel lays no claim to any position, so far as this case is concerned, but that of a suppliant who has influence with God. That is all we can do for one another,—the work of an instrument, the ministry of an agent. That word *all* has more force in it than the mere monosyllable. Why, what is there more than that? To understand the world's case,—to comprehend the terrible results of the world's apostasy,—to reproach, rebuke, and exhort in the name of God,—and then to gather the world we have branded with God's condemnation and pray for it unto the God of heaven! When a man has done that he has exhausted his resources; he has done more—he has moved Omnipotence towards condescension and redemption!

"I will pray for you unto the Lord." Then the human needs the divine. We never find—taking great breadths of history, ages and centuries—that the human has been able to exist alone, and to grow upward and onward in its atheism. We do find

hours in which atheism seems to carry everything its own way. There are occasions in human history when God seems to be utterly deposed, when a whole nation has got up and out-voted God, emptied heaven, brought down the sky to the dust; but never lifted up the dust to the sky! Observe that such periods have been but occasional; they have always been transitory, and in proportion to the length of their duration has there afterwards gone up a cry to God, that he would come back again. If he would but once show his face, the men who repudiated his existence and renounced his name "would dash their idols at his feet, and call them gods no more." What is true in nations is true in individuals. To any man who has not been living for God we may say: You have not been living upward. You have been living; you have not changed your address; people have recognised your physical features; but you have not been going up in the quality of your being,—your pathos has not become tenderer, your charity has not become purer, your nobility has not enhanced itself. This is a plain thing to say to a man's face, but we should say it, yet not we but the whole Triune God and all history,—when a man lives without religion—we will not say irreligiously, as if he were profane and blasphemous, in the ordinary sense of those terms—his life is a diminishing quantity; he goes down in the volume and quality of his being.

Israel was gathered together to Mizpeh. The Philistines, the enemies of the house of Israel, having heard that Israel had gathered together to Mizpeh, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. Observe, Israel was gathered at a prayer meeting. That is a modern expression, and not much in favour with men who are "advanced." We do not know what they are "advanced" in, and perhaps it is better on the whole not to inquire. The Philistines went up against Israel, congregated for a devotional purpose; and when the children of Israel heard it they were afraid of the Philistines. And the children of Israel said to Samuel, "Cease not to cry unto the Lord our God for us." What became of the Philistines? The Philistines had won many victories; they had proved their prowess in arms as against the house of Israel; they had taken the ark of God when Israel resorted to the formal rather than to the spiritual. Now that

Israel is getting its old heart back again, and its eyes are being turned to the heavens, what becomes of the Philistines? The Lord thundered that day upon the Philistines, and discomfited them, and they were smitten before Israel.

“And the men of Israel went out of Mizpeh, and pursued the Philistines, and smote them, until they came unto Beth-car” (v. 11).

There is a great law here. To some minds this must, of course, be sentimental. To men who have seen prayer under certain aspects and circumstances,—who have known godly persons, hard driven in life, unable to conduct a successful struggle, and yet who have been praying all the time,—this must appear to be little better than mockery. But many others have known precisely the same thing under a different class of circumstances leading to the same gracious and undeniable results. The Philistines came against a praying army. We must consider not what the praying army did in the first instance, but what God did. The Lord thundered, and the Philistines were deafened; the Lord touched the heads of the Philistinian army, and they went crazy; the Lord wielded his hand before the eyes of the Philistinian leaders, and they were blind! It is nothing to him to save whether there be many or few.

In this case it does not appear from the text that God took the rod of his lightning and utterly discomfited the Philistines. He thundered! When God's voice rolls over human life, it is either a benediction of infinite peace or a malediction no human force can turn aside. Observe when it was that Samuel said he would pray for the house of Israel. The great lesson here turns upon a point of time. When Israel returned unto the Lord with all their heart; when Israel put away the strange gods and Ash-taroath; when Israel prepared the heart unto the Lord and was ready to serve him only; when Israel had done this part, then Samuel said, “I will pray for you unto the Lord.” Under other circumstances prayer would have been wasted breath. We find a great law here, which applies to the natural and the spiritual. Is there a plague in the city? Purify your sanitary arrangements, cleanse your drains, disinfect your channels, use everything that is at all likely to conduce to a good end,—then pray

unto the Lord. After nature has exhausted herself, there may be something for the Lord to do, may there not? Who are we? Where did we obtain our education? Who put us up just one inch above the infinite that we might be able to say to God, "Now the people have done everything, there is nothing for thee to do"? Who are we? A man ought to have a good many certificates, credentials, and testimonials before he is able to establish a status which will justify him in suggesting that when all natural processes have been exhausted, God cannot do anything. What if God should be just one iota wiser than we are? What if after we have exhausted the resources of our skill and the efforts of our strength, God might be able to say, "See, there is one more thing to be done"? It would not be according very much to God, would it? Blessed are they who believe that after they have exhausted themselves, God can do exceeding abundantly above all that they ask or think!

Sometimes worldly people say—"Pray for us." Men have said that to us. What kind of men were they? Sometimes men who have made wrecks of themselves, who have gone as far devilward as they could get, whose hearts were like a den of unclean beasts, men who had no longer any grip of the world—the whole thing was slipping away from them—they have said to the minister whom they had previously characterised as a canting parson, "Pray for us." But one condition must be forthcoming on their part. There must be not only consciousness of loss, and consciousness that they cannot fight against God any longer, and that their next step will be into the jaws of the devil—there must be more than that. There must be self-renunciation, contrition, moral anguish, pain of the soul, repentance towards God. When these conditions are forthcoming, the servant of Christ may say, "I will pray for you unto the Lord."

In the third place, look at the exalted attitude which Samuel assumes in relation to his whole lifetime. We read in the fifteenth verse of this chapter, "Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life." Think of being able to account for all the days of a whole human history! Think of being able to write your biography in one sentence! Think of being able to do

without parentheses, footnotes, reservations, apologies, and self-vindications! When we attempt to write our lives, there is so much to say that is collateral and modifying in its effect,—so much which is to explain the central line. When we have written our biography, we have seen great blank spaces—we do not know what we did then; we have seen great black patches, and we have known that these indicated service of the devil; we have seen blurred, blotched pages, with erasures and interlineations, and we have said, “This reminds us of the daily and terrible mistakes of our life.” So our biographical record becomes anomalous, contradictory, irreconcilable. Here is a man whose lifetime is gathered up in one sentence. “Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life.” We have seen him in his childhood, we have had glances of him as he was passing up to his mature age. To-day we see him in three impressive and remarkable attitudes. His whole history is in this sentence: He was a judge of God all his days. Think of giving a whole lifetime to God. There are those who cannot do that now. But young men may be able to give twenty, thirty, perhaps fifty years all to Christ. Fifty years in succession; no break, no marring interruption,—half a century given to Christ! Some grey-haired old men may be following this study. Perhaps they are not within the circle that is divine; they may not be numbered amongst the members of the redeemed family, and now all that they can give is just the fag-end of a life. To such we would say: Death cannot be long in meeting you! Perhaps next year only,—perhaps to-morrow. The young may die, the old must. You may only have six weeks left; you had better give them than not give anything at all.

“While the lamp holds out to burn,
The vilest sinner may return.”

There was a thief saved on the cross, but only one thief.

See then the profound influence which may be exerted by one life. We are dealing with Samuel, and with Samuel alone. Samuel's life is not confined to himself; it is a radiating life, streaming out from itself and touching thousands of points in the social and national life of others. Who can tell what may be done by one man? We shall not quote the testimony of a friend

on this point, because he might be partial in his judgment. But once an enemy gave explicit testimony upon this point, and we shall accept his words just as he himself gave them. His name was Demetrius ; he was an idol-maker ; trade was slipping out of his fingers fast ; he was not making so many gods as usual ; and he spake to the people of the city in these words : " Ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul persuadeth and turneth away much people, saying, that they be no gods, which are made with hands." It was a valuable testimony. It was an enemy writing the report of the Church for the last year. It was the devil, reading a secretarial report of what one man had done. This Paul ! Not ten thousand Pauls, not a great army of Pauls, but one little man, with an immeasurably great soul, who was not only working mightily in Ephesus against idolatry, but throughout all Asia ! What one life can do. Let no man despise himself ; do not say, " My little influence is of no avail." Every man can be intense, though only few men can be extensive in influence. The father upon the house, the head of the business in his own establishment, the friend among his friends, the mother in the nursery,—each life can have a speciality of intensity in these high matters. Whoso would wield profound, eternal influence, let him help the souls of men ; get away from things that are superficial, local, and self-contained ! Speak the truth of God, and eternity itself cannot exhaust the happy effect of that blessed influence !

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thy claim upon our worship is unceasing, for thy mercy, like thy majesty, endureth for ever. Thou dost never withhold thine hand from giving good gifts unto thy children. As thou hast made them in thine own image and likeness, and hast implanted within them desires which the world cannot satisfy, so thou dost especially reveal thyself unto them day by day, appeasing their hunger with bread from heaven, and quenching their thirst with water out of the river of God. Oftentimes have we said concerning thy Son, We will not have this Man to reign over us. But when we have tasted the bitterness of sin, and have been convinced of our own emptiness and helplessness, when heart and flesh have failed, when by the ministry of thy Holy Spirit we have come to understand somewhat of thine own holiness and mercy and love, our hearts' desire has been that Jesus might sit upon the throne of our love, and rule our whole life: that he might be King of kings, and Lord of lords, our Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. We desire to live unto the glory of God, to understand the meaning of the gift of life with which we have been blessed. Thou hast entrusted us with solemn responsibilities: enable us to understand their meaning, to feel their pressure, and to respond with all our hearts to their demands. Let thy blessing rest upon us. May thy house be unto us as the gate of heaven; may weary souls recover their strength and tone. May desponding hearts be revived and comforted with the consolation of God. May worldly minds be given to feel that there is a world higher than the present: that round about us is the great sea of thine eternity. May we be prepared for all the future, having our hearts cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ. We depend upon thy Holy Spirit; we will not look unto our own resources, except as they present themselves as the gifts of God. We will rely upon thy power; we will cry mightily unto our God! Thou wilt hear us; thou wilt redeem our souls from all fear; thou wilt inspire us with immortal hope; thou wilt clothe us with adequate power. Cleanse our hearts by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus. Show to us, more and more, the meaning of the mystery of his dear cross. May we find all that is deepest and truest in our own life symbolised in that cross of Jesus. May it be the answer to our sin, the remedy of our diseases, the one hope of our wondering and anxious souls! Amen.

1 Samuel viii. 5.

"Make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

MAKING A KING.

WE have seen Israel defeated, almost destroyed, in war with the Philistines. We have seen Israel in extremity, prostrate before Almighty God, and crying unto him, in intolerable woe, for interposition in the time of torment and hopelessness. The prayer has been responded to, and Israel has been revived. A new hope has cheered the hearts of those who prayed unto the Lord of heaven. In the revival of strength Israel has become political. A new idea has occurred to the leaders of the people, namely,—that a king should be required and should be set over Israel, that Israel might be like all other nations. That seems a very reasonable request, as viewed from a certain point. It becomes us, therefore, to look at it the more carefully; because, if so-called reasonable requests be followed by the disasters which accrued upon the prayer before us, it becomes a matter of infinite moment that we should know the significance of the words we use and the full compass of the desires which we express. Truly this is a chapter of incident; the movement is rapid from beginning to end. Let us watch it; and let us gather together, so far as we may be able, the great principles with which this graphic chapter is so fully charged. The elders of Israel said unto Samuel, "Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations." The people of Israel, it appears, were extremely particular about the morality of other people. They had facts on their side. Samuel's sons did not walk in their father's ways, but turned aside after lucre, took bribes, and perverted judgment. When the elders of Israel saw this apostasy on the part of the sons of Samuel, they said, "Let us do away with this race of men altogether, and have a crowned head to reign over us, that we may be like the other nations of the earth." Let us then do full justice to the elders of Israel. As a matter of public notoriety, Samuel's sons were not like Samuel himself in their moral tone and in their moral example. This brings before us a sad and humiliating fact,—that the children of great men and of

good men are not always worthy of their parentage. Few things can be more humiliating to a high nature, to a Christian philanthropist, than to find that his public work is undone in the very circle within which his own influence ought to have been most intense; that he, who is instrumental in doing so much good abroad, should actually have to come home to find what sin is in its utmost keenness, in its intolerable bitterness. Sometimes public men may be to blame for this in some degree. They may have to say, "Other vineyards have I kept; my own vineyard I have not kept." They may be more fitted for public teaching and public stimulus than for private utterance of truth and domestic control of life. This ought to be carefully understood before we venture to pronounce judgment upon such men, who in their own hearts feel a greater bitterness than it would be possible for us by our own mere reproaches to infuse into them. There are men who can speak to a thousand hearers, who are utterly weak and powerless when they come into the details of common life and have to teach a single child at home, and show the light of God upon the private paths of life. Others there may be who turn their public excitement into a temptation to go astray from plain, simple home duty. They have the ability; they are lacking in will. They can only show themselves upon public platforms, within great arenas of display; they are moved by public, rather than by intensely personal and moral considerations. Consequently, their own garden-wall is broken down, their own little flower-bed at home is all weed-grown, whilst they are busy with the great public fields and the great vineyards of the world. We should not speak harshly of such fathers: but if there be anything in these suggestions, and if any man should require a hint of the kind, tenderly, with self-restraint and brotherly forbearance, we would venture to say, Think of this; and, if you can improve, remember that now is the accepted time; you cannot too soon begin the work of family cultivation.

This brings before us the equally remarkable fact, that grace is not hereditary. When we see a good man we expect his children to be like himself. But grace does not descend in the family line. The father may be an apostle, the son may be a blasphemer. There are circumstances, no doubt, in which at the very moment

that the father has been preaching the gospel, his own son, whom he loved as his life, has been fulfilling some profane engagement, has been blaspheming the name of the God of his fathers! This is very mysterious, inexpressibly painful, most disheartening to the man who wants to live a simple, godly, sincere, useful life. The fact is overbearing. To the son of a godly man we would say: Your father's godliness will not save you; your father's godliness abused on your part, disregarded by you, will augment the wrath from which you shall one day suffer. It is one of many talents given to you; and to whom much has been given, from him shall much be expected. He that had the opportunity and the privilege, and abused what he had, shall be—it is the voice of justice, common sense, and righteousness—beaten with many stripes. Why should it be thought a thing incredible, or why should it be a thing invested with tormenting mystery, that a child should not inherit the father's piety? It is precisely the same with intellectual gifts in many cases; it is the same with physical endowments in many instances. We find, again and again, a great man, a man of wondrous compass of mind, great and manifold ability, whose son is of a very ordinary type of intellect. It is wonderful,—but there is no occasion why we should torture it into a mystery, and look at it as one of those things which should affright us from the religious or the devotional side of life. We have not to explain these things. We may pause before them and learn much from them; but the explanation is not with us at all.

It is important to gather all these things together in order that the case of the elders of Israel may be turned as much to their advantage as we possibly can. What our object is in thus defending them will presently appear. The elders of Israel had a case. They were concerned for the nation; they saw the two sons of Samuel going astray from their father's paths; they came to the man when he was old, and told him about the apostasy of his sons. They said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations." If ever men apparently had a simple, straightforward, common-sense case, the elders of Israel had such a case in the chapter which is now before us. Samuel heard this statement, and the thing displeased him. No man likes to see his whole

life disregarded, and his tower thrown away ruthlessly. Samuel was a man in advanced life, identified vitally with the religious and political fortunes of Israel; had his hopes with regard to the future; drew out of his own life the hopes by which he was animated. Now suddenly the elders of Israel say, "We wish to dispossess all who may be supposed to have any claim upon us through your agency and instrumentality; we wish to open a new political era in Israel." No man likes to see the tower of his life thrown down in that way. We have sympathy with old ministers who have old-world notions; who view with what appears to younger men an almost ungenerous suspicion and distrust what they call new-fangled notions and methods of doing things. After all, there is a good deal of human nature and common sense in the old man's view of the changes which are proposed to him. He started from a given point; he has worked along a certain line; a man cannot disinherit and dispossess himself of all his own learning, culture, traditions, and associations, and go back again or go forward into the infancy of new and startling movements. It would be well if men could learn this more profoundly. Young Englandism and young Americanism must be very distasteful to old Samuels, high-priests, and venerable prophets. We shall show our strength by showing our moderation; we shall be most mighty when we are most yielding!

Samuel told the Lord about it. This is very startling to those who live at a far distance from God. These old men seem always to have been living, as it were, next door to him, and had but to whisper and they were heard. These little sentences come in so abruptly. We read, "And Samuel prayed unto the Lord." Not, "Samuel ordered a high ladder to be made that he might set it up against heaven, and creep up to it round by round;" but the record is "Samuel prayed unto the Lord." It is a kind of breathing process, it is ready, spontaneous as love. Samuel turned towards the elders of Israel, heard their story, then turned his face about and told God concerning the whole thing. It is a wonderful kind of life,—God always so nigh at hand. Will he not be equally nigh at hand to-day? Has he still to be sought for as if he had hidden himself beyond

the voice of the thunder, or is he nigh at hand so that a sigh can reach him, and a whisper can stir his omnipotence into beneficent interposition on behalf of his sorrowing, suffering people? It would be a new life to us if we knew that God beset us behind and before, laid his hand upon us, and that not a throb of our heart escaped the ear of his love!

Samuel saw the outside of the case. Samuel saw, what we now call, the fact of the case; God saw the truth of it. Many persons do not distinguish between fact and truth. There is an infinite difference between fact and truth. Fact is the thing done, the thing visible, the thing that has shape, and that can be approached and touched. Truth underlies it. We must get at the truth before we can understand the fact itself. This is ever necessary, but specially needful where matters are complicated by profoundly moral considerations. The Lord explained the case to Samuel. He said, in effect, "Thou art quite mistaken; the matter is not as thou dost view it; looked at from thy point, the elders of Israel seem to have a very strong and excellent case. But, Samuel, the elders of Israel have rejected me, they have not rejected thee. They are only making a tool of thee; thou art become to them a mere convenience, or as it were a scapegoat. They profess to be very deeply concerned about the moral apostasy of thy sons; they do not care one pin-point about it; they are extremely glad to be able to seize upon anything that will seem to give a good colouring to their case. Samuel, Israel has cast off its God. Is it wonderful, then, that Israel should cast off the servant?" What an explanation this is! how it goes to the root and core! how it cleaves open the life of man, and holds up in the sunny universe a corrupt soul, that all men may see it and know that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked! What a subject opens upon us here! The great world of excuses, social explanations, the faces which things are made to wear, the visors and disguises which are set upon life in order to conceal its corruption, its leprosy, its death. Truly the word of God is sharp and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword! It will not let a man alone; it will not allow a man to tell his own story, and go away as if he had exhausted the case. He is permitted to state the circumstances, to make his own

advocacy of given questions, to put the question before society just as he pleases. But when he sits down, this word that searches the heart and goes through the life like a flaming fire says, "Now I will tell you what it is; you have made an excuse into a reason; you have lied, not unto me, but unto the Holy Ghost, unto God! Your case looks well. But I open thee now, I cleave through thee, I pour the sunlight through every fibre of thy leprous being, and I brand thee liar and blasphemer!" It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

See, for example, an individual who has a most excellent case. He goes to his minister, and says to him in a whine, which soft men may mistake for earnestness, "I really cannot remain here any longer, sir. I have seen so much inconsistency in the members of the Church; I have seen so much that has pained me; I have felt grieved at the inconsistency of professing Christians; therefore, I am going to turn over a new page, and I must withdraw from the Church." He was pained! What that poor creature carried in the way of other people's immoralities, no arithmetic can ever calculate, no poetry can ever dream! When he has told his tale, and impressed the poor minister, who believes well of everybody, in proportion as he does not know human nature, God says to him, "This is the case. That man would not care one farthing if all the Church were to prove traitorous to-morrow; that man, who has suffered so much pain, who has been so troubled about the inconsistencies of professing Christians, is now planning sin secretly in his soul; if I could show thee by taking off, fold after fold, thou wouldst see in his heart what he has never said to his wife or mother or child or friend; thou wouldst see there a determination to enjoy sin under some disguise. He wants to get clear of moral restraint, of social discipline; he wants to evade public opinion, that he may, in concealment and under such defence as secrecy may set up, enjoy sin as he has never enjoyed it before. Mark him, going away yonder, bearing the inconsistencies and immoralities of other people! He is now going to carry out the very first step of his plan—to enjoy the works of iniquity, sources of forbidden pleasure as he never partook of them before." So there are two judgments

in the world. Man makes out his own case, God comes with the explanation. Man cheats man with outside appearances ; afterwards God holds the light over the case. All things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do !

Here is a minister of the Gospel, who says he is going to withdraw from the ministry and retire into private life. He has been so annoyed by circumstances which have arisen around him ; he has been so fretted and chafed by a multitude of things, that he can no longer endure them ; and now he is going to enjoy the retirement of private life. That is his statement. What does it amount to ? He is going to run away because there are some difficulties in life. As if he ever could get into any sphere in this world where difficulty would not call upon him, and force its attention upon his reluctant soul ! Has he told all the case ? Has he not kept back part of the price ? Is he not rather arranging his circumstances so that he can sin with larger license,—that he can do things in private life which he dare not do under the responsibilities of a public position ? These words cut like daggers and search like fire ! God forbid they should have any application to us !

The Lord told Samuel to make the people a king. "Hear them ; do what they ask ; hearken unto their voice : howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and shew them the manner of the king that shall reign over them." This is an instruction that we should do well to carry out in all life. There are times when we are pressed into certain courses ; when all we can do is to protest. Sometimes when a man is weak then is he strong. The lifting, the half-lifting of a tremulous hand means—when interpreted by God's wisdom—battle, battle to the bitter end, protest, vehement opposition ! It is a feeble sign : but the meaning of that poor, broken hand being lifted up is, that if the man could do that which is in his soul he would stem the torrent of the popular will and set up righteousness in the earth ! The Lord instructed Samuel what to say. Here is the speech which was made to the elders of Israel :—

'And he said, This will be the manner of the king that shall reign over you : he will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots,

and to be his horsemen; and some shall run before his chariots. And he will appoint him captains over thousands, and captains over fifties; and will set them to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make his instruments of war, and instruments of his chariots. And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your oliveyards, even the best of them, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men, and your asses, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep: and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall cry out in that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you in that day" (viii. 11-18).

What then? When they heard the speech they said, "Nay; but we will have a king over us." Observe how men can fight their way, when so determined, through all the warnings that even God can send. We should have supposed that the elders of Israel, in whose heads was lodged the wisdom of the people,—the men of sagacity, penetration, and self-control,—on hearing these words from the Lord's prophet would instantly have said, "Then do we repent of the sin of our request: God shall continue, if his mercy will so incline, to be our King for ever." Instead of that, they hear the warning, they see the thunderbolts, the whole future is depicted to them in words which have not two significations. As the result of the whole, they lift up their voices and say, "We will have a king to reign over us." Do we condemn them? Let us not be ready with reproach; nor urgent in condemnation. We are doing a deadlier thing, it may be, than the elders of Israel did in this case. We are told that God is angry with the wicked every day; that the wicked shall be driven into hell, and all the nations that forget God. We are told that the liar shall have his portion in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, that no drunkard shall enter the kingdom of heaven, that anything that is unclean, defiled, or corrupt, shall not pass into the city of God's light; we are told that nothing remaineth for the sinner but a fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation. All the terrors of the Lord are thundered from time to time upon the people. What is the result? Men can go immediately from hearing or reading the most terrific statements concerning the future of the wicked, and can throw themselves with unbridled license into all the diabolical enjoyments which

stimulate but never satisfy the corrupt soul ! By so much as we condemn Israel, we condemn the sinner. It may be that in pronouncing the elders of Israel foolish and criminal, we write ourselves worthy of the condemnation of God !

Observe, man can have his way. There is a point at which even God withdraws from the contest. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man." If we be so minded, we can force our way through all solemn warning, all pathetic entreaty, all earnest persuasiveness on the part of friend, wife, husband, teacher, preacher, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost ! We can go to hell if we will ! So do not be discouraged, you can get there ! Do not be discouraged, there is nothing before you but love, grace, mercy, tenderness, God. That is all. There is a grim ghastly cross,—hew it down ! There is a way round it, a way through it, a way over it,—you can get there ! Fool, coward !

See the childishness of the reasoning by which they supported their case. "That we," said the elders of Israel, "also may be like all the nations ; may be like other people." That is what the young man says when he is hard pressed. When he wishes to throw off family restraint, when he wishes to get away from family prayer, family reading of the Bible and domestic superintendence, he says, "I want to be as other men are ; other young men of my age have this privilege and that privilege, and I just want to be like other men." That sounds very reasonable, but is that all ? Be true to thyself, O young man ; do not tell lies to thyself. If thou hast lies to tell, why not tell them aloud—tell them to other people ; why tell lies to thine own heart ? To say it is only this you want ; whereas thou knowest well, in thy heart of hearts, that it is some terrible wickedness to which thou wishest to give way.

Where the disease is vital, the remedy must be vital too. Nothing will reach this disease but the mediation of God the Son. It is not a speck of dust which any hand can rub off. The disease is in the heart, the poison is in the blood. The death is in the life—this is no paradox, but an awful, grim, terrible truth.

What, then, will reach it? The blood of the Son of God, the agony of Gethsemane, the atonement of Calvary, the wondrous, unspeakable, glorious work of Jesus Christ, Son of God, God the Son! Nothing else can reach it. Every other remedy is cutaneous, is transitory. The remedy of Christ's cross, Christ's atonement, is vital, and is therefore eternal!

SELECTED NOTE.

The mustering of the Hebrews at Mizpeh on the inauguration of Samuel alarmed the Philistines, and their "lords went up against Israel." Samuel assumed the functions of the theocratic viceroy, offered a burnt-offering, and implored the immediate protection of Jehovah. He was answered with propitious thunder. A fearful storm burst upon the Philistines, who were signally defeated, and did not recruit their strength again during the administration of the prophet-judge. The grateful victor erected a stone of remembrance, and named it Ebenezer. From an incidental allusion (vii. 14) we learn, too, that about this time the Amorites, the inveterate foes of Israel, were also at peace with them—another triumph of his government. The presidency of Samuel appears to have been eminently successful. From the very brief sketch given us of his public life we infer that the administration of justice occupied no little share of his time and attention. He went from year to year in circuit to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpeh, places not very far distant from each other, but chosen perhaps, as Winer suggests, because they were the old scenes of worship (*Real-Wört*, sub voce).

In Samuel's old age two of his sons were appointed by him deputy-judges in Beersheba. These young men possessed not their father's integrity of spirit, but "turned aside after lucre, took bribes, and perverted judgment" (viii. 3). The advanced years of the venerable ruler himself and his approaching dissolution, the certainty that none of his family could fill his office with advantage to the country, the horror of a period of anarchy which his death might occasion, the necessity of having some one to put an end to tribal jealousies and concentrate the energies of the nation, especially as there appeared to be symptoms of renewed warlike preparations on the part of the Ammonites (xii. 12), these considerations seem to have led the elders of Israel to adopt the bold step of assembling at Ramah and soliciting Samuel "to make a king to judge them." The proposed change from a republican to a regal form of government displeased Samuel for various reasons. Besides it being a departure from the first political institute, and so far an infringement on the rights of the divine head of the theocracy, it was regarded by the regent as a virtual charge against himself, one of those examples of popular fickleness and ingratitude which the history of every realm exhibits in profusion. Jehovah comforts Samuel by saying, "They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me." Being warned of God to accede to their request for a king, and yet to remonstrate with the people, and set before the nation the perils and tyranny of a monarchical government (viii. 10), Samuel proceeded to the election of a sovereign. Saul, son of Kish, "a choice young man and a goodly," whom he had met unexpectedly, was pointed out to him by Jehovah as the king of Israel, and by the prophet was anointed and saluted as monarch. Samuel again convened the nation at Mizpeh, again with honest zeal condemned their project, but caused the sacred lot to be taken. The lot fell on Saul. The prophet now formally introduced him to the people, who shouted in joyous acclamation, "God save the king."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, may the hour of worship be exceeding precious to the souls whose desire is towards thee. Come down upon us as a light above the brightness of the sun, as the cooling dew upon the parched grass, and as showers that water the earth. Bring to our memory the bitterest recollections of our sins, and then show us the cross of redemption, that our sorrow may be swallowed up in unspeakable joy. Show us thy name plainly written on every daily mercy. May our bread and our water remind us of God. May the light be a revelation, and the darkness a shield of defence. May joy be as an angel sent down from heaven, and sorrow as a cloud which shall hasten us home. Pity us in hours of weakness : save us when strong billows go over our heads. Let thy pardon be given to us, guilty helpless men, and it shall be well with us evermore. Amen.

1 Samuel x. 9.

“God gave him another heart.”

SAUL.

THE threads of daily life often appear to be either loose and unrelated or hopelessly entangled. At times we seem to have nothing to do with each other. We go on our separate ways. It is only now and then that we find lines touch each other, and form figures, and see that under the apparent simplicity of daily affairs there are being wrought out strange plots, romances which no human dreamer had ever conceived, and combinations which give life new interest and enhanced importance. A man climbs a hill that he may in solitude revel in the delights of the landscape, and, lo, a little child meets him there, and the supposed accident is the turning point in his life. A traveller turns aside that he may drink of the well by the way, and, behold, the stranger who was there before him, and who would have been gone in one moment more, becomes the chief joy of his life, the ruler of his fortunes, the sovereign of his destiny. So it ever is. We know not what we do. We go, and know not how we shall return. We lie down, not knowing that the morning shall bring

us a new life. We speak, and our word lifts some listening soul almost to heaven. Thus our life is a mystery ; we are strangers, yet friends. We live for many years apart, and by-and-by there comes a moment which unites us in holy confidence, giving all mysteries a meaning, and showing all difficulties to be but steps up to heaven.

The circumstances in connection with which the text is found naturally lead us into this strain of animating, yet tranquillising, reflection. The Lord had determined to grant the request of Israel for a king. Instructions to that end were given to Samuel. A certain man had lost his asses. Saul went to seek them, and in the course of his errand it was made known to him that he was to be the king of Israel. Let us study portions of the narrative, and gather some of the practical lessons with which the story is so richly charged.

“And the asses of Kish, Saul’s father, were lost” (ix. 3).

This is one of what may be termed the vexatious and stupid affairs of daily life. It is apparently a most paltry statement to be found in a book which is a revelation from heaven. The asses were lost, what then? Who cares? Yet out of this simple circumstance there may arise events which shall startle the most indifferent reader. The asses being lost, Kish commanded his son Saul to take with him a servant, and go in pursuit. To this command Saul instantly responded; yet this is the more remarkable, seeing that Saul is described as “a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people.” Smart young men ought not to be sent upon menial errands. Might not Saul have regarded the request of his father as imposing upon him a most vexatious and humiliating duty? Contrast the majesty of his person with the contemptibleness of his errand, and say whether there be not an immeasurable disproportion. Yet Saul, so imperial in bearing, so choice and goodly in all the attributes of physical manhood, appears instantly to have obeyed the behest of his father. The filial spirit never sees anything contemptible in the paternal desire. Men should rule their

lives not by the insignificance of the service, but by the sublimity of the one Ruler in whose hands are the laws and destinies of life. Saul might have looked at the object alone ; instead of that he looked at his father, in that look we find the secret of his obedience and alacrity. When the disciples went to seek the ass for Jesus Christ, they thought not of the meanness of the duty, but of the dignity of the Master.

“ And he passed through Mount Ephraim, and passed through the land of Shalisha, but they found them not : then they passed through the land of Shalim, and there they were not : and he passed through the land of the Benjamites, but they found them not ” (ix. 4).

In this verse there is nothing but the hollow sound of repeated disappointment. It emphatically describes the negative side of life. There are men to-day who are repeating this experience with most painful faithfulness. Go whither they may they find not the object of their pursuit. They climb the hill of difficulty, and, behold, their errand is lost. They speed along deep and dangerous valleys, and, lo, the object of their pursuit eludes and mocks them. They arise with the sun, they tarry until the return of the stars, their nerve is constantly on the stretch, their whole life becomes a tormenting anxiety, yet the desire of their heart is withheld from them. Their days are but repetitions of a disappointment, which is fast deepening into despair. Of how many may it be said that their experience is within the limits of this dreary verse ! Life is to us hollow, empty, and mocking. The lifting up of our hand doth but bring us weariness, and the putting forth of our strength only adds to the vexation of our spirit. Of what use is history, if an event of this kind does not renew our hope and vivify our past experience ? We are not the only men who have shivered on the dark side of life. Look at Saul, wearily wandering from place to place, inquiring, looking, hoping, yet finding all his efforts ending in disappointment ! Is there not a meaning in all this ? Is it possible that God can be taking any man along so painful and barren a road to an end which shall bring elevation and gladness ? The road to honour is often long and hard. Men have to endure the discipline of disappointment before they can bear the reward of success.

“ And he said unto him, Behold now, there is in this city a man of God,

and he is an honourable man ; all that he saith cometh surely to pass : now let us go thither ; peradventure he can shew us our way that we should go " (ix. 6).

The great advantage of having a man of God in every city : the man of God makes his influence felt for good, and becomes honoured and trusted in matters which are not strictly religious. Two travellers have lost their way, and, behold, they inquire of a man of God ! The great principle which underlies all incidents of this kind is that in all perplexities and embarrassments the man of God should be the chief of earthly counsellors. There are crises in life when a man's moral influence goes for something. The man of God is sought out in trouble rather than in joy, and it is the brightest of his glories that he is willing to help those who never would have gone to him but for the stress of their difficulties. Is it not repetition to say that Samuel was an honourable man as well as a man of God ? Might not the latter title have included the former ? It undoubtedly includes all elements and attributes that are virtuous, honourable, true, and beautiful ; yet there is a horrible possibility that a man may avow the name of God, and yet know nothing of the restriction and dignity of social honour. There are men in the Church whose signature stands for nothing, whose words are full of deceit, and whose covenants are but so much waste paper. A very beautiful image is this of the position of Samuel. What is the vocation of the man of God ? It is to tell other men their way ! All men are morally lost ; the man of God points out the way of recovery : all men are in intellectual confusion by reason of their moral depravity ; the man of God shows the way to the light ! Ministers of the Gospel are appointed to tell men the way. This, too, is the appointment of heads of houses, conductors of educational institutions, and those who mould and lead the sentiment of the times. It should be observed that this word was spoken, not by Saul, but by his servant. The man of God was known by repute to the servant of the king, who knew and trusted the servant of the living God. Not only did he himself trust Samuel, but he commended him to the confidence of Saul. Despise no man. God's signature may be found in unexpected places. The little maid told the household the name of Elisha,—the servant told Saul of Samuel.

"Then said Saul to his servant, But, behold, if we go, what shall we bring the man? for the bread is spent in our vessels, and there is not a present to bring to the man of God: what have we?"

"And the servant answered Saul again, and said, Behold, I have here at hand the fourth part of a shekel of silver: that will I give to the man of God, to tell us our way" (ix. 7, 8).

Saul was a gentleman, every whit! Eastern customs aside altogether, there was a vein of gentlemanliness in the nature of Saul. He was about to ask a favour, but a preliminary question arose in his mind. Absurd indeed is the idea of giving anything to the man of God for his services! Ask him what questions you please; exhaust his intellectual resources; drain every current of his sympathy: and when you can get no more out of him, turn your back upon him, or starve him out! The last thing you can kill in a man is true gentlemanliness. George Whitefield, when he had but a cow-heel for dinner, would have the frugal meal set out with as much care as if it had been a banquet. There are two ways of doing everything. It was but little that Saul had to give, yet he gave it of his own free will, and with all the grace of a natural king. We are not to pay mere prices for knowledge and direction in life; we are to give gifts of the heart,—such donations as are inspired by our love, though they may be limited by our poverty. It should be noted that this little arrangement was made before the lost travellers went into the presence of Samuel. It came of the spontaneous motion of their own hearts. The question was not, What dost thou charge? What shall we give thee? But a plan was laid beforehand, and Samuel was not subjected to the indignity of a commercial inquiry. Christian Churches might learn a great lesson from this example. We should then no longer see compensation given with the hand of patronage, which ought to have been bestowed with the hand of thankfulness and justice. A minister is invited to preach in a distant town; at considerable personal inconvenience he accepts the invitation; the greater part of two days may be consumed in discharging the service which has been requested at his hands; and as he is about to return to his home, he is asked to name the amount of his expenses! There is no free gift; there is no offering of love; there is no working out of a plan of reward; there is rather a

desire to keep him down to the lowest possible line, and a disposition to increase public charities at the expense of personal justice. This whole thing is an abomination to Christian society. No man who works for the Churches ought ever to be asked what his expenses are ; his services should be requited on principles of the highest justice, without himself being subjected to interrogations respecting his railway and cab fares. Modern gentlemen may learn something from the ancient aristocracy.

When Saul had found his way to Samuel by the direction of the young maidens who were going out to draw water, and who, to their credit, knew the movements of the prophet, and the order of the religious engagements of the day, Samuel said to Saul, "As for thine asses that were lost three days ago, set not thy mind on them ; for they are found." A wonderful kingdom is the kingdom of God ! Though Samuel had before him the future king of Israel, and he himself was about to be deposed from his own supremacy, yet he communicated to Saul intelligence of the lost asses ! Doth anything escape the care of God ? Doth not God care for oxen ? Doth a sparrow fall to the ground without our Father's notice ? If we give the great concerns of our life into the hands of God, nothing that belongs to us shall be accounted unworthy of his notice. Mark the consideration and forethought of the prophet. Though about to dazzle the eyes of Saul with unaccustomed brilliance, yet he paid attention to the family concerns in which Saul was interested. The lesson is great to those who have hearts to understand.

"And Saul answered and said, Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel ? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin ? wherefore then speakest thou so to me ? " (ix. 21).

A man should inquire what background he has when a voice like Samuel's sounds in his ear. Saul was informed that on him was set all the desire of Israel : under such an announcement it was natural and proper that he should look to his antecedents, that, so to speak, he should gather himself up, and take correct measure of his manhood. A word of caution is needed here. Inquiry into our antecedents and resources should never be made with a fear of evading duty and difficulty. A very subtle temp-

tation assails us from this side. Spurious modesty may reduce to the uttermost poverty and insufficiency, in order that by so doing it may lure us from paths of difficulty and hard service. We may speak of our loaves and fishes as if they were nothing simply that we may save them for our own consumption. There is a self-reduction which is actually a self-preservation. There is a way of saying that we are unworthy which really means that we are afraid. The inquiry should show us the disproportion between our strength and God's call. Such a revelation will do us good. When humility is saved from degenerating into fear, it becomes a source of strength. Moses complained that he was a man of slow speech; he desired that God would send his word by some other messenger, because of his incapacity and unworthiness. Jeremiah urged in response to the call of God, that he was but a little child. Saul declared that he was of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and sought to escape the duty of the hour through a sense of personal inadequacy to fulfil its demands. There is a medium between spurious self-depreciation and presumptuous boastfulness. That medium is reliance upon the sufficiency of God. Whom God calls he also qualifies. He can batter down great fortresses with any weapon which he may choose. The web of the spider shall become as an impregnable wall, if God so will. A little one shall utterly destroy countless thousands, if that little one strike in the name of God.

Having had this interview with Samuel, Saul started on his way; and we read "that when he turned his back to go from Samuel, God gave him another heart." Observe, not increased intelligence, not additional personal stature, not any outward sign and proof that he was elected to be king of Israel; God gave him another heart. The question of life is often a question of feeling. There are many who know theologically the way of salvation; they could answer satisfactorily many questions in theology; they know the difference between falsehood and truth; yet their feet are set in the broad way, and their faces are towards the City of Destruction. What they want is another heart. Your life requires to be set on fire with the love of God. "With the heart man believeth unto righteousness." "My son, give me thine heart!" We shall not be saved by the number and excellence

of our intellectual ideas, but because we have cast our whole heart at the feet of the Saviour of the world, who came to teach men the love of God.

The cry arose amongst the people, "Is Saul also amongst the prophets?" If we have to excite surprise in society, let us see to it that the surprise is awakened, not by our moral degeneracy, but by our religious elevation. If we go to the gaming-table, we shall excite surprise; if we be found on the race-course, we shall excite surprise; if we assume the leadership of bad men in bad courses, we shall excite surprise; but what of such surprise? We may, by increasing our devotion, by multiplying our beneficent labours, by courageous service in the kingdom of God, excite a surprise which shall indicate that we are no longer amongst those who live only for this world, "whose god is their belly, and who glory in their shame."

We have spoken of a king. Jesus Christ is the true King of men! Will we have him to reign over us? Are we willing to be the subjects of his immortal crown? "Choose you this day whom ye will serve!" Blessed is the man who shall run away from the camp of the alien, and set himself beside the standard of Calvary!

SELECTED NOTE.

"Go, seek the asses" (ix. 3).—The search appears to have been conducted without any settled plan, and among the Tartars such journeys appear to be frequent. Every one has a private mark upon his beasts, and when they stray their ownership is easily ascertained. A Tartar with a large extent of plain before him will set out at sunrise, not knowing which way to go, but choosing the direction from any chance that inclines him, this way or that. He rides on till sunset, and then dismounts, fastens his horse, and gets his supper. He carries with him in a bag six pounds of the flour of roasted millet, which is sufficient to last him thirty days. Day after day he goes on, observing the marks of all the herds he meets, and receiving information from any who, like himself, are in search of stray cattle. Very likely the search of Saul was somewhat similar.

PRAYER.

O THOU who art merciful and gracious, full of compassion and long-suffering and tenderness, thou art kind to the unthankful and to the evil ! We hasten to thee with our offering of praise, inasmuch as thou hast crowned our life with loving-kindness and tender mercy and made it beautiful with continual love. We praise thee ; we magnify thee ; we offer thee the whole strength of our heart. We hasten to thee as men who have been mocked by the promises of the world, and who long to find satisfaction in thine infinite and unspeakable peace. We have been disappointed. The staff has been broken in our hand and pierced us. We mistook the scorpion for an egg. We have hewn out for ourselves cisterns ; but they are broken cisterns, which can hold no water. Foiled, smitten, wounded, humiliated, and disgraced, we come into thy presence, knowing that in God, as revealed in the person and doctrine of Jesus Christ and made known unto us by the ministry of the Holy Ghost, we can find rest which our souls could not find elsewhere. All our springs are in thee. Thou givest us what we need. They who are in thy presence, who live in thy light, and thy love, hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither are subjected to weariness or decay. We would live in God. We would have our being in the Eternal. We would know nothing among men but Jesus, and him crucified ; and by the mystery of pain and the mystery of love, symbolised by Christ's cross, we would endure the trials of the world, and discharge the whole service of life. Meet us as sinners and pardon us ! The blood of Jesus Christ, thy Son, cleanseth from all sin. May we know its cleansing, healing power ! We have done the things we ought not to have done ; we have withheld the testimony which it became us to deliver ; we have often been timid and unfaithful ; we have hesitated when we ought to have gone forward ; we have compromised where we ought to have died ; we have become self-seekers where we ought to have sought the crown of martyrdom ; we have kept an unjust balance and an untrue weight ; our measure has been false ; our word has been untrue ; our spirit has been worldly ; our very prayers have been selfish. All this we say when we truly know ourselves, as we are revealed to ourselves by the in-dwelling, all-disclosing Spirit. God be merciful unto us, sinners, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness ! Give us the hearing ear, and the understanding heart, the obedient will, the ever industrious hand in the service of Jesus Christ. When we have done our best to serve our day and generation, and the time of reckoning has come, may we find all our worth in the worthiness of the Lamb, and be accounted fit to sit with him on his throne, because in our degree we have shared the pain and shame of his crucifixion ! Amen.

1 Samuel x. 24.

"God save the king."

SAUL'S KINGDOM.

WE have previously remarked upon the lowly-mindedness of Saul. The proposition which was made to him showed to his own consciousness, as he had never seen it before, how poor and even contemptible was his claim to social supremacy. "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? wherefore then speakest thou so to me?" It is well when great demands show us our own insufficiency. Sometimes they do but touch our vanity, and then they show that they are not morally great, but great only in high-sounding words,—infinite pretensions without substance or value. In solemn crises men show their quality. Loss takes a man's character to pieces fibre by fibre, and shows him what he is made of. Prosperity takes a man to the edge of a great cliff, and proves whether he be a giddy adventurer or a wise and understanding pilgrim. Sometimes we are revealed to ourselves by a tremendous shock. In an unexpected moment a kingdom is offered to us, and then we see into the hidden places of our hearts; ambition maddens us into presumption, or modesty drives us to the Strong for strength. In the case of Saul we see proof upon proof, direct and incidental, that he was self-distrustful and diffident. When his uncle asked him what Samuel had said, "Saul said unto his uncle, He told us plainly that the asses were found: but of the matter of the kingdom of which Samuel spake he told him not." When the time came to show him forth to Israel, Saul could not be found, and the Lord himself had to tell the people that their prospective king was hidden amongst the stuff. We are now to witness the setting up of the kingdom of Israel. It is a royal day. A new epoch opens. Israel loses the distinctiveness of the theocracy, and becomes like the other nations of the earth.

Let us first of all hear the inaugural speech of Samuel.

"And Samuel called the people together unto the Lord to Mizpeh, and

said unto the children of Israel, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you :

" And ye have this day rejected your God, who himself saved you out of all your adversities and your tribulations ; and ye have said unto him, Nay, but set a king over us. Now, therefore, present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes and by your thousands" (x. 17-19).

Here is the destruction of a great religious memory ! What is our life when we have taken out of it all the recollections which redeem it from irreligiousness and vanity ? Some of us would be poor indeed, were it not for the hidden treasures of secret memory. In our depression we remember the day of God's deliverance. When we look onward, and see the distant horizon filled with angry clouds, we look back, and see the way of light along which God has conducted us ; and the pious memories of a life which has been a succession of wonders, revive and establish our confidence in the Holy One. The history before us is fraught with mournful instruction to men who trifle with their best memories. We condemn those who treat lightly what we have done for them in their hours of darkness and sore distress. What if we have forgotten the Egypt out of which God has brought us, and have clamoured for some lower gift than himself ?

It is to be observed that in this instance it was not a theoretical but a practical, casting off of God. This is one of the great difficulties of Christian life, and the sign which the Church makes to the world. It is full of mystery and heart-breaking sadness. Men retain God in their written creed, but depose him from the throne of their life. Men who would be startled to find themselves described as atheists, yet they daily live atheistically. Israel would have been shocked had the charge of theoretical atheism been made against the nation ; at the same time that very nation, so tenacious of a theoretical creed, resolutely thrust God off the throne. We say we believe in God, yet in our daily life we never mention his name. We are excited to indignation by the blasphemies of atheism, yet we legislate God's Book out of our educational institutions ! We have God, but no godliness. We have a creed, but no life. We worship with the lips, but our heart is dumb.

Look at the terrible possibility of God allowing men to have their own way ! Israel insisted upon having a king. God said, In so insisting, you are rejecting and grieving me ; yet take him and see the end ! We may clamour until God's patience yields to our importunity, and he inflicts upon us the intolerable punishment of allowing us to have our own way. By this means only can some be taught the sinfulness and weakness of their own aims. Our self-sufficiency can be destroyed only through our self-gratification. Did not God allow us to carry out our will in many directions, there would linger in our hearts misgivings respecting the equity and perfectness of his government. We fix our eyes upon glittering objects in the distance ; we regard those objects as of priceless value ; we believe that their possession will elevate and satisfy our best capacities and desires. God plainly tells us that what we desire will prove to be a mockery¹ and a torment ; yet, in spite of this revelation, we renew our entreaties, and urge our demands. At length God says, "Take that you desire." We take it, and, lo, it poisons our life, and turns our future into an intolerable terror.

We should notice solemnly the worthlessness of the success which is founded upon spiritual apostasy : Israel got a king, but Israel had first rejected God ! There is a success which is but so much guilt. We get what we want, but the basis is rotten. We give up the spiritual and invisible, and imagine that we are rich because we take in exchange mountains of dust and clouds of mist. Your house is noble, commodious, and extremely inviting ; a ruddy light is shining through its windows ; sounds of music and delight are filling its every chamber ; but what of all this, if your splendid mansion be founded on a bog ?

"God save the king" (x. 24).

In this act we see the tyrannic and fatal influence which one bad idea may exercise in a man's life. The case had been stated in a manner which ought to have caused a change of mind on the part of Israel ; yet, in the face of Samuel's distinct charge of practical atheism, Israel persisted in realising a special wish. The desire for a king became a monomania. Everything was looked at through the medium of that idea. It impaired the

natural power of human judgment, it silenced every suggestion of conscience and obligation, and drove Israel headlong to the consummation of a dominant purpose. Men should be careful how they allow any single idea to rule them. It is but seldom that an isolated notion can be profoundly true. Ideas are to be compared one with another; they are to be viewed in their mutual relations, and to be modified by the deepest moral consideration. It is often only by throwing an idea into perspective that we get a true conception of its value and importance. To have a king, summed up the whole desire of Israel. This idea, instead of being a light to them, actually dazzled and blinded them by being brought too closely to their vision.

Israel was guilty of a most aggravated violation of decency in this matter. Though the people had, in the language of Samuel, rejected God, yet, in hailing their king, they appealed to the very God they had, with infinite ingratitude and recklessness, cast off! They shouted, "God save the king;" that is, they committed their king to the God whom they had denied; they first deposed God from the government of Israel, and then asked him to bless the king whom they had set up in his stead! Such is the contradictoriness, and such the insanity of selfish and undisciplined life. We fill up impious acts by pious ejaculations: we despise God, and then use his name in wishing blessings for others. Truly we are witnesses against ourselves!

"And Saul also went home to Gibeah; and there went with him a band of men, whose hearts God had touched.

"But the children of Belial said, How shall this man save us? And they despised him, and brought him no presents. But he held his peace" (x. 26, 27).

All men are made stronger by the fellowship of the good. When we are put into exceptional circumstances, either of elation or depression, we are the better for the sympathy and loving trust of "a band of men, whose hearts God has touched." The king cannot do without his subjects. Every man must have around him those in whom he has special confidence. There must be favouritism in human association. The selection of friends does not involve the development of enmity or even distrust, in relation to others. The king has his favourite coun-

sellors; the minister has his special advisers; the general, the captain, the leader, whatsoever be his name, must have next to him a man in whose judgment he has entire confidence. It is in this way that society is consolidated. Yet even in the instance of Saul we have not only light, but shadow. The children of Belial looked upon him with an evil eye, and said, "How shall this man save us?" Is not every one of us enclosed by concentric circles? If we are God's children, there is nearest to us a circle of heavenly guardianship, of Christian defence and sympathy, and such honour as is given by God to faithful men; then farther off there is a circle of evil ones who despise us and constantly seek to upset and destroy us. Saul's conduct under such circumstances was most instructive: we read, "But he held his peace." Silence is wisdom; silence is strength. It might gratify a momentary feeling to speak angrily to the men who thus set themselves against us, but it is infinitely better to look as if we saw not, and to ponder many things in our hearts. Who are we, that we should expect to escape the criticism of the children of Belial? Such children are the contemporaries of all ages, and it is impossible for them to change the malignity of their dispositions.

Now danger came. The Ammonite laid his hand upon the sword. The people of Jabesh-Gilead were sore afraid; for Nahash encamped against them. They prayed that he would make a covenant with them; and his answer was: "On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach on all Israel." The leaders of Jabesh prayed for seven days' respite, that they might find if in all the coasts of Israel there was a man who had strength and skill to save them. When the condition of the people became known to Saul, the Spirit of God came upon him, and his anger was kindled greatly. The day of battle came, and the men of Jabesh "slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass that they which remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together." So much for the earnestness of one inspired man! We are but ciphers until God finds the unit to set at our head; then we who were nothing in ourselves stand up a living and mighty host. Saul could not

have done this work alone, the men of Jabesh could not have done it alone; this is a lesson to the Church; the general and the army are mutually necessary; the teacher and the taught in divine things must honour one another as both being needed to take captive the world in the name of Christ.

We admire Saul's deliverance of Jabesh-Gilead: we are touched by every element of heroism that we find in the men of history: it is right that we should respond to the efforts and sacrifices made by the splendid leaders who have conducted the battles of truth and justice to a successful issue; but our homage to heroism should be carried into still higher regions. We praise Saul; shall we forget the Son of God? "When there was no eye to pity, and when there was no arm to save, his own eye pitied, and his own arm brought salvation." What instance is there in all human history to be compared with this for all that is sublime in courage and pathetic in sacrifice?

SELECTED NOTE.

"*And Saul also went home to Gibeah*" (x. 26).—During the time of the Judges, when the country was almost in a state of anarchy (Judges xix. 1), Gibeah became the scene of one of the most abominable crimes, and one of the most awful tragedies, recorded in Jewish history. The story of the unfortunate Levite, the siege and destruction of Gibeah, and the almost total annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin are well known (xix.-xxi.). The city soon rose again from its ashes, and had the honour of giving Israel its first king. It was the native place of Saul (1 Sam. x. 26; xi. 4), and the seat of his government during the greater part of his reign (xiv. 2; xxii. 6; xxiii. 19); hence its appellation "Gibeah of Saul" (xv. 34). It was in Gibeah the Amorites of Gideon hanged the seven descendants of Saul in revenge for the massacre of their brethren. The city was then the scene of that touching exhibition of maternal love and devotion, when Rizpah, the mother of two of the victims, "took sackcloth and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest, until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest upon them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night" (2 Sam. xxi.). The last reference to Gibeah in the Bible is by Isaiah in his vision of the approach of the Assyrian army to Jerusalem (x. 29). The city appears to have lost its place and power at a very early period. Josephus mentions it as "a *village* named *Gabath-Saul*, which signifies 'Saul's hill,' distant from Jerusalem about thirty furlongs" (*Bell. Jud.* v. 2, 1). Jerome speaks of it as "*usque ad solum diruta*" (*Opp.*, ed. Migne, i. 883). From that period, until discovered by Dr. Robinson, its very site remained unnoticed, if not unknown.

PRACTICAL ROYALTY.

1 Samuel xi.

AT this time Saul occupied a somewhat anomalous position. He had been anointed king of Israel, and all the people had shouted and said, "God save the king." It would appear from this as if Saul had really become king of Israel, and in a certain sense that was so; but in the disordered times in which the kingship was proclaimed Saul went home to Gibeah, and continued to discharge his agricultural and social duties. He was, therefore, little more than a king in name. There were certain sons of Belial indeed who despised him, and brought him no presents. They were probably princes and leading men of rival tribes, bitterly displeased because the first king of Israel had been chosen out of the insignificant tribe of Benjamin. Saul had made no great mark in history, so there was nothing so obviously great in his career as to command universal admiration and respect. In the language of modern times, he had yet his spurs to win. It is to his credit, however, that when the worthless men despised him, he had sufficient self-control to hold his peace. Such control is always associated with the highest royalty. The man who can rule his own spirit is better than he who can take a city. Sometimes silence is the last expression of power. In the eleventh chapter circumstances occur which bring Saul into the full exercise of his royal functions. Read:—

"Then Nahash the Ammonite came up, and encamped against Jabesh-gilead : and all the men of Jabesh said unto Nahash, Make a covenant with us, and we will serve thee. And Nahash the Ammonite answered them, On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel " (vv. 1, 2).

Nahash was king of the children of Ammon, and was in some indirect way related to David. The men of Jabesh-gilead had

always been kind to the tribe of Benjamin, indeed they had been the only friends of Benjamin at a critical period of the history of that tribe. Now that Nahash came up and encamped against Jabesh, the inhabitants of the invaded district proposed that Nahash should make a covenant with them, and that they should serve him. The inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead were cut off from communication with the larger districts and provinces of their country, and no doubt a sense of loneliness had considerably depressed them; they were willing, therefore, to mitigate their solitude by entering into a menial covenant with Nahash the Ammonite. It is often true in life that circumstances drive us to make approaches which are not congenial. Men are driven by stress of health or poverty, or some form of perplexity not easily to be named in words, to offer to put themselves into relations with people whom under other circumstances they would never treat with. Such facts in life we are bound to recognise. And it would betoken a poor quality of nature on our part to associate with such recognitions too severe a moral condemnation. Our common proverb is to the effect that "adversity has strange bed-fellows." The men of Jabesh-gilead, therefore, must be regarded as persons who are under oppressive circumstances, and who are willing to make the best of conditions which are very galling and humiliating. While such were the circumstances of the men of Jabesh-gilead, these circumstances developed the moral quality of the King of the Ammonites. We know what men are when we see how they treat those who are supposed to be in their power. Circumstances develop the nature of men on all sides of a controversy,—depressing some, they stimulate others to anger and revenge, or they develop cupidity and selfishness to a degree which brings infamy upon their name. It was so with Nahash the Ammonite. He was ready to make a covenant with the inhabitants of Jabesh, and this was his answer,—“On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it for a reproach upon all Israel.” There we see the true nature of the man. There indeed we see a faithful exhibition of human depravity. This kind of cruelty must not be considered as confined to Nahash; it is the very mystery of iniquity which is found in every human heart, or if not found there, it is

concealed, because circumstances constituting a sufficient temptation have not appealed to it. It is easy to fall into a mood of horror in relation to the iniquities of other men, and to suppose that when we shudder at their vices we exhibit virtues of our own. No language is too severe to condemn the barbarous cruelty of Nahash ; in very deed he appears before us more like a child of hell ; at the same time he only shows what we might be under circumstances of equal temptation and pressure. When we see how man can treat man, we are enabled to reason upwards, and to see how possible it is for man to treat God profanely and blasphemously. When man loves God he loves his neighbour also ; but when man ceases to love his neighbour, and then passes from mere displeasure to positive and cruel hatred, it is easy for him to carry the spirit of hostility further and to include in its base action even all that is heavenly and divine. The moment we can treat a man unjustly and cruelly we have disqualified ourselves for true prayer and real communion with Heaven. Let there be no mistake about this matter. We cannot give up our philanthropy and retain our Christianity. We may be troubled in metaphysical thinking, and may sometimes depart from acknowledged lines in that high region of religious contemplation and worship, but there must not be the slightest shaking of our moral relations as between man and man, or if there is, we may justly infer that such violation of social sympathy and justice had a distinct bearing upon the reality of our religious character. The man who could issue the condition named by Nahash was simply incapable of sustaining any living relation of worship and trust to the true God.

“ And the elders of Jabesh said unto him, Give us seven days’ respite, that we may send messengers unto all the coasts of Israel : and then, if there be no man to save us, we will come out to thee. Then came the messengers to Gibeah of Saul, and told the tidings in the ears of the people : and all the people lifted up their voices and wept. And, behold, Saul came after the herd out of the field ; and Saul said, What aileth the people that they weep ? And they told him the tidings of the men of Jabesh. And the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard those tidings, and his anger was kindled greatly. And he took a yoke of oxen, and hewed them in pieces, and sent them throughout all the coasts of Israel by the hands of messengers, saying, Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. And the fear of the Lord fell on the people, and they came

out with one consent. And when he numbered them in Bezek, the children of Israel were three hundred thousand, and the men of Judah thirty thousand" (vv. 3-8).

The spirit of Jabesh was not utterly quenched. The lingering fire that was in the breasts of the elders was blown into a blaze. A marvellous mystery is this, namely, how difficult it is utterly to quench and destroy the spirit of man. Even in the very midnight of despair there flames up unexpected energy. The elders of Jabesh asked for seven days in which to consider the condition which the King of Ammon had proposed. Such respite has been common in all wars claiming to be regulated at all by the spirit of civilisation. At that critical moment the messengers of Jabesh came to Gibeah of Saul. Ancient friendship urged its plea. We have seen that Jabesh and Benjamin were always on friendly terms, and now that Jabesh is in extremity it will be for Benjamin to show the reality of the historical friendship.

A very beautiful picture is presented in the fifth verse. Saul was engaged in his usual pursuits. The King of Israel was actually discharging offices with the herd in the field, attending to the wants of his cattle, and otherwise going about his business soberly and quietly. No intimation of unusual circumstances seems to have reached him. How unconscious we sometimes are of the circumstances which are nearest to us,—unconscious, that is to say, of their real import and deepest meaning! When we think all is proceeding as usual we may be within touch of some occurrence that will determine all the remaining actions of our life. The commonplace and the marvellous often lie closely together. Why should there be any commonplace in life, in the sense of taking out of existence everything that can stimulate our best nature and build us up in the comfort of an enlarging and assured hope? He who does his plain and simple duty, in the field and in the market-place, is best prepared for any unusual occurrences that may break in upon the monotony of his life. He who is faithful in few things shall be made ruler over many things. There is but a step from the field where the herd gathers and the throne which unites and dignifies a whole nation. The picture, then, is that of a great man attending to simple daily duties, and it will be a sad day for any people who

imagine that simple daily duties are not worthy of the dignity even of the greatest man. Saul observed that the people who came near to him were in great distress :—"All the people lifted up their voices, and wept." They were at their wits' end. We shall now see whether it is true that man's extremity is God's opportunity. It is certain that the men of Jabesh can do nothing for themselves, and it is very uncertain to them whether any other man can do much for them. But they went to the greatest man known to them. Society has a right to expect great things from great men. No greater tribute could be paid to Saul than that threatened and despairing men should appeal to him in the time of their agony. The men who shouted, "God save the king," did not pay Saul so fine a tribute as the men who came to him in their extremity and asked for his sympathy and assistance. Really to pray is really to adore. This doctrine is true also in human relations; really to cast oneself upon the resources of a great man is to pay that great man the highest compliment in our power.

No sooner had Saul heard the condition proposed by the King of Ammon than he burned with anger. We can best describe a certain quality of anger by tracing it to the direct action of the Spirit of God. Truly, there is a holy indignation. We are conscious of no moral or mental shock when we read the simple terms that "the Spirit of God came upon Saul;" truly it could be no other Spirit, for depravity had reached its utmost degradation, and the terms proposed were so treasonable to everything human and right that they could only be answered justly and completely by fire directly sent from heaven. The sublime enthusiasm of Saul kindled the faith of the people. A common impression seized them that this was the man for the occasion; so "they came out with one consent." It has been pointed out that the circumstances here recorded suggested to the poet Asaph the splendid image presented in the seventy-eighth Psalm :—"Then the Lord awaked as one out of a sleep, and like a mighty man that shouteth by reason of wine." The action of Saul seems to represent the action of the Divine Being. See how one earnest man becomes an army in himself! How true it is that great causes only need great

leaders; and how true it is also that great leaders can only be made by the Spirit of God: they are not artificial men; they are not bound by mechanical laws and standards; they seem to be special creations and to be accountable to none but God for the outgoing and expression of their holy inspiration. A modern commentary, referring to this passage, has the following illustrative remarks:—"It was owing to some influence of a similar nature, that with scanty numbers, ill-armed, and ill-trained, the Swiss won for their land centuries of freedom on memorable fields like Laupen and Morat, though the proudest chivalry of Europe was arrayed against them. It was the same spirit which impelled the peace-loving traders of the marshes of Holland to rise as one man, and to drive out for ever from their loved strip of Fenland the hitherto invincible armies of Spain. No oppressor, though backed by the wealth and power of an empire, has ever been able to resist the smallest people in whose heart has burned the flame of the divine fire of the fear of the Lord." All these circumstances would be of little or no concern to us if they did not point to a great spiritual reality. Tremendous foes besiege us on every side. Through mind, body, and estate the great temptations come a hundred strong; yea, a thousand, multiplied by ten, yea, until their number seems to be beyond calculation. What is our defence in such time of assault? It is the fear of the Lord, the Spirit of God, the divine energy. Where the love of God burns in the heart, or where the Spirit of the living God directs the whole energy of the life, a little one shall chase a thousand, and ten thousand shall be put to flight because of the mighty power of the indwelling Spirit. Religious rapture is a necessary element in religious education. We must sometimes become so conscious of the infinite power of God as to lose all consciousness of our own little strength, and go forth to war as if all the battalions of Heaven were placed entirely at our service.

"And they said unto the messengers that came, Thus shall ye say unto the men of Jabesh-gilead, To-morrow, by that time the sun be hot, ye shall have help. And the messengers came and shewed it to the men of Jabesh: and they were glad. Therefore the men of Jabesh said, To-morrow we will come out unto you, and ye shall do with us all that seemeth good unto you. And it was so on the morrow, that Saul put the people in three companies; and they came into the midst of the host in the morning watch, and slew the Ammonites until the heat of the day: and it came to pass, that they which

remained were scattered, so that two of them were not left together" (vv. 9-11).

The answer returned by Saul was more than equal to the condition proposed by Ammon. A time was fixed for the combat; Saul put the people into three companies, and the attack ended in the utter discomfiture of the Ammonites. God delights in humbling the boastful and vainglorious. "He that exalteth himself shall be abased." Presumption is always self-defeating: it is so in business, in war, in statesmanship, and in every act and department of rational life. "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall." The people who yesterday were overborne by dismay are to-day standing upon the very mountain of victory, and the wind seems to take delight in blowing out the banner of triumph. When will men learn from history that presumption is, to say the least of it, a mistake? "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off." Here again the spiritual interpretation is the great lesson to which we have to take heed. It is infinitely foolish to suppose that we can overcome diabolic assault by our own wisdom or grace. The enemy is mightier than we are, and his heart is full of cruelty. We must advance in the spirit of David, saying, "I come to thee in the name of the living God." Omnipotence can express itself through the humblest medium; so much so that the word of those who are faint in heart shall become a mighty tone, having in it a mystery which cannot but excite the fear and disable the strength of those who oppose the best aspirations of the soul.

Notice that this war was not entered upon without preparation. There was no rush or haste in the matter. Sometimes we proceed most swiftly when we seem to advance most slowly. There should be a time for gathering strength together, measuring the situation in all its dimensions, consulting divine decrees, and putting the soul into right relations with God. After such preparation everything will go rapidly. Every stroke will be a victory. Every arrangement will be a step in advance never to be retraced. There must be no flutter or fear or agitation; otherwise the completeness of our faith will be disturbed: we must be fully and strongly prepared by divine communion, then

the shock of war will bring with it nothing but victory to the right. The Church should be continually challenging the foe, not in a spirit of boastfulness, as if by wisdom and learning the kingdom of heaven could be set up; but with faith, sobriety, trust in God, assurance of righteousness; then the result will be the promotion of the dominion of truth.

"And the people said unto Samuel, Who is he that said, Shall Saul reign over us? bring the men, that we may put them to death" (v. 12).

Now Saul is king in very deed. Popular enthusiasm had been so excited that the people wished to slay the men who had put any disloyal question regarding the sovereignty of Saul. They were quite aware that such questioning had been operating in the minds of some part of the nation, indeed they were not afraid to refer to the disloyalty when they themselves were prepared to smite it with a final blow. But here Saul shows himself to be truly royal. The man who held his peace when he was aware of what the children of Belial had said, is the same man who this day declares that not a life shall be cut off. The self-control of Saul is shown clearly in the depth of his religious feeling. Instead of taking credit to himself, and boasting loudly that he was the man who alone was qualified to be captain, he stood back, and as he retired to his proper place he said, This is the Lord's doing, not mine,—*"To day the Lord hath wrought salvation in Israel"* (v. 13). So long as Saul keeps in this mood, nothing can disturb the security of his throne. Men whose characters are based on strong religious foundations shall not fear the wind when it blows, or the lightning when it passeth to and fro from the east to the west; they abide under the shadow of the Almighty: and when great distress rages in all directions they are filled with infinite and imperturbable peace. Let us remember this incident; the recollection of it will help us in studies that are yet to follow.

Apart altogether from the history of Saul as an individual, the same great law applies to every department of human life. When a man begins to boast that he has by his own energy made himself rich, he has already opened the window through which his wealth will fly. When a man lifts his arm and boasts what its sinew has done for him, that sinew has already begun to decay.

We must live and move and have our being in God. When Herod accepted the worship of the people in the sense in which they conveyed it, as intimating that he was a deity and not a man, a most terrible fate befell him. Our strength is in our humility. Our dignity is in our communion with God. Once allow anything to come between us and the altar, between our strength and the cross from which it is derived, and instantly the vital communication is cut off, we flutter for a moment, and then die in weakness and shame.

"Then said Samuel to the people, Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there. And all the people went to Gilgal; and there they made Saul king before the Lord in Gilgal: and there they sacrificed sacrifices of peace offerings before the Lord; and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly" (vv. 14, 15).

A fit ending to a tragical process. Gilgal was a sanctuary. After great doings on the field of battle we must return to the house of prayer, we must, indeed, return to the place where we began. We should enter upon no conflict until after we have been in the sanctuary, and having completed the conflict we should return to the altar. Enter upon nothing that cannot be sanctified at holy places and by holy names. There is nothing too insignificant to be associated with the most solemn acts of worship; or if we are conscious of such insignificance, we should not undertake the affairs which admit of its application. At Gilgal the kingdom was renewed, and at Gilgal indeed the kingship of Saul was consummated. There was indeed no fresh anointing of Saul as if to repair some omission of the past; what occurred at Gilgal was a national endorsement of what had been done popularly and partially at Mizpeh. What took place is described as having been accomplished "before the Lord,"—words which imply that the ark was in sight, or that the high-priest took part in the ceremony, having with him the mystic Urim and Thummim.

Thus Saul's private life was ended; henceforth he was the leading figure in the history of his times. Learn the useful lesson that Saul did not thrust himself into prominence, and that even after he was anointed king of Israel he went about his usual avocations until there was something worthy of kingliness to be publicly done. Let us be rebuked in so far as we have supposed

that we were released from duty until some great and critical occasion arose. Having obtained our literary prize, let us go home and take up the business of life in a quiet way. Having been greatly honoured of the people, let us not betake ourselves to a life of vanity and frivolity, but go home and discharge the duties of the household with simplicity and fidelity. Do not think that anything which nature or society requires of us is below our dignity because we have achieved this or that popular success. Then when the time of action fully comes, and greater honours still are accorded to us in the sight of all the world, let us hasten to Gilgal, the sanctuary, the chosen place of God's presence, and there thank him that we have escaped the dangers of battle, and entered upon the enjoyments of victory which he himself conferred.

SELECTED NOTE.

"Come, and let us go to Gilgal, and renew the kingdom there" (v. 14).—Saul was elected at Mizpeh, in a solemn assembly by the determination of the miraculous lot—a method of election not confined to the Hebrews. Previous to that election (x. 16) and subsequently, when insulted by the worthless portion of the Israelites, he showed that modesty, humility, and forbearance which seem to have characterised him till corrupted by the possession of power. The person thus set apart to discharge the royal function possessed at least those corporeal advantages which most ancient nations desiderated in their sovereigns. His person was tall and commanding, and he soon showed that his courage was not inferior to his strength (1 Sam. ix. 2; x. 23). His belonging to Benjamin also, the smallest of the tribes, though of distinguished bravery, prevented the mutual jealousy with which either of the two great tribes, Judah and Ephraim, would have regarded a king chosen from the other; so that his election was received with general rejoicing, and a number of men moved by the authority of Samuel (x. 26) even attached themselves to him as a body-guard, or as counsellors and assistants. In the meantime the Ammonites, whose invasion had hastened the appointment of a king, having besieged Jabesh in Gilead, and Nahash their king having proposed insulting conditions to them, the elders of that town, apparently not aware of Saul's election (xi. 3), sent messengers through the land imploring help. Saul acted with wisdom and promptitude, summoning the people *en masse* to meet him at Bezek; and having at the head of a vast multitude totally routed the Ammonites (v. 11) and obtained a higher glory by exhibiting a new instance of clemency, whether dictated by principle or policy—"Novum imperium inchoantibus utilis clementiæ fama" (Tac. *Hist.* iv. 63), "For lowliness is young ambition's ladder,"—he and the people betook themselves, under the direction of Samuel, to Gilgal, there with solemn sacrifices to instal the victorious leader in his kingdom (1 Sam. xi.). Here Saul was publicly anointed, and solemnly installed in the kingdom by Samuel, who took occasion to vindicate the purity of his own administration—which he virtually transferred to Saul—to censure the people for their ingratitude and impiety, and to warn both them and Saul of the danger of disobedience to the commands of Jehovah (1 Sam. xii.).

SAMUEL'S DEFENCE.

1 Samuel xii.

IT would seem that a fitting time had now come for Samuel's retirement from his great position. We are all conscious of the fitness of certain historical occasions, so much so that we can adopt the duties which they suggest with a sense of harmony and rectitude. After the splendid victory acquired by Saul it would seem as if the dispensation of Samuel must naturally close. Blessed is he who can say, "He must increase, but I must decrease;" and still more blessed is he who looking back upon all his career can adopt the language and spirit of the veteran Samuel. In this noble speech there is no sign whatever of intellectual exhaustion or the blunting of that fine sagacity which had so long led the policy and fortune of Israel. It is better for men to retire whilst in full possession of their faculties, rather than to live themselves into the deserved contempt of their fellow-men. Still, throughout the speech there is a tone which expresses something like resentment, as if the old man would have gladly continued but for the impatience of the unruly populace. Who likes to resign a great leadership? We should consider these things in looking upon men, and their offices, and their supposed duties. Probably we do not make allowance enough for the instincts which constitute our very manhood. It is easy to stand by and to suggest to other men that they should resign their positions and abandon the fields in which they have won a hundred honours; but it is not always so easy for the man who is most deeply implicated to rise to this heroism of self-renunciation. We should be patient with our veteran leaders, our old statesmen, our well-proved teachers and guides. It is instructive to observe, however, the wonderful manner in which Providence intervenes, to show when times have arrived for the cessation of this or that function and the inauguration of

a new period of rule and service. Things work together quite wonderfully in this way ; so much so that an attentive observation of their course impresses the mind with the fact that there is a Power, call it by what name we please, which centralises all things and gives them their best applications. Samuel seems to have pondered upon all the events of his time so wisely as to have come to the conclusion that the hour of retirement had arrived. Let us now hear his valedictory speech. Even though the king walked before Israel, Samuel was not afraid to call attention to himself. It is notable that the whole reference is distinctly of a moral quality. He seems to be anxious only to come out of the court of trial with an unstained character. He asks for no crown or sceptre or purple of a merely artificial or decorative kind ; his one desire is to be clothed with the robe of an unpolluted reputation. Truly, it is a kind of heaven which the old man claims. He would be called good, rather than great. Is there a finer picture upon earth than an old and grey-headed man who is able to challenge the world to bring a just accusation against him ? Samuel was able to descend into minute details, and to show that in so-called little things he had lived a life that was beyond suspicion. Samuel had lived in the blaze of noonday since he was a child ; indeed, he could hardly be said to have had any childhood, so early was he pressed into the public service. Now he looks up to the heavens, and asks that the people might witness against him if they had any charge to make. "Behold, here I am : witness against me before the Lord, whose ox have I taken ? or whose ass have I taken ?" (v. 3). The ox and the ass represent possessions of considerable value in that primitive age and in a country where agriculture was the principal source of revenue. A further inquiry is, "Whom have I defrauded ? whom have I oppressed ?" For many years he had been supreme judge in Israel, and now that he is about to retire from the judgeship, he gives all men liberty to speak and to testify against him if they could. Throughout the whole year nothing was more common than for judges to receive bribes, in order that their favour might be bought and a wealthy criminal might escape. On this point Samuel puts a direct inquiry :—"Of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith ?"

These are searching questions, and every man who professes to be godly ought to be able to put them to his own age. What if we have kept all the dogmas of orthodoxy and performed all the ceremonies of artificial religion, if we have not been free from the spirit of covetousness, or if we have defrauded or oppressed the helpless and the weak? Away with the orthodoxy that is not supported by a pure morality! "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." "Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings." These are the conditions upon which God offers communion to man; not intellectual conditions which only a few can attain, but moral conditions which are open to the whole world. The virtue of our public men has a large influence upon the virtue of society. Where there is corruption at the head, there must of necessity be some measure of corruption in all the departments which that head rules. Like priest, like people. It is true that sometimes the nation has been in advance of the throne in the purity of its moral sentiment; but it is also true that where the throne has been renowned for probity and beneficence a very happy influence has been exerted upon the nation at large. In this regard it is of infinite importance that men should pray for their kings, rulers, judges, and magistrates, that society in its highest places should be kept pure and healthful. Every man will have to give an account of his life, and it rests with the man himself, to a large extent, whether that account shall be good or bad. It is not every one who may be able to stand up with Samuel and make the same wide and minute challenge, with the same consciousness that exculpation will be the result of the searching criticism; at the same time, here is a line by which we may be guided; here is an ideal towards which we may constantly aspire.

It is further noticeable that the challenge which Samuel addresses to the people is strictly limited to themselves. There is no appeal to God to testify that Samuel has always been in his sight a pure and holy character, without stain or blemish. There is no pharisaic boasting, no challenge addressed to Heaven, claiming the crown on the ground of good

conduct. A very wide distinction is noticeable between an appeal to society and an appeal to Heaven. Samuel was talking in his public capacity, and in his public capacity he pressed every question which he asked ; he was not engaged in the exercise of prayer, urging his respectability upon the attention of Heaven, and claiming to have been alone faithful in a faithless world. In this respect a man may adopt two distinctly different tones. Addressing his fellow-men, he may speak in a tone of superiority, moral dignity, and stainless honour ; in doing so he may in reality be magnifying God, though there may be no nominal profession of so doing ; on the other hand, when he comes face to face with God, none may hear the moaning of his discontent, or see the tears of his contrition, as he reflects upon his innumerable shortcomings and perversities. The purist and the Pharisee, therefore, must not be allowed to take encouragement from the example of Samuel, that they may boast themselves as before God. All such boasting is vain and false. Even Samuel himself may say, in the secrecy of the sanctuary, "God be merciful to me a sinner !"

"And Samuel said unto the people, It is the Lord that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt. Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers. When Jacob was come into Egypt, and your fathers cried unto the Lord, then the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, which brought forth your fathers out of Egypt, and made them dwell in this place. And when they forgot the Lord their God, he sold them into the hand of Sisera, captain of the host of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab, and they fought against them. And they cried unto the Lord, and said, We have sinned, because we have forsaken the Lord, and have served Baalim and Ashtaroth : but now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, and we will serve thee. And the Lord sent Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel, and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and ye dwelled safe. And when ye saw that Nahash the king of the children of Ammon came against you, ye said unto me, Nay ; but a king shall reign over us : when the Lord your God was your king " (vv. 6-12).

Once more we come upon an excellent practice established in olden times, namely, faithfully to recount the history of God's providence, so far as it is known in human experience. The days are never separated from one another, and treated as detailed points of time. The historians and prophets of Israel

always seem to be searching for the central line of history, which indeed is the central line of purpose; hence we find continuity and cumulativeness in the statements of all the men who address the nation. Very noticeable are these speeches for their statesmanlike comprehensiveness. Every one of them begins at a well-ascertained historical point, and continues the story without omission or perversion up to the then immediate day: this is a philosophy as well as an example. We miss the whole meaning of divine providence if we look at events separately and incidentally, as we miss the whole meaning of the Bible if we read it in detached portions and texts. The providence of life is an inspired revelation of God, but it must be read in its continuity if its meaning is to be correctly and profitably seized. Not what was done yesterday, or the day before, but what was done on the earliest and on every succeeding day, is the inquiry which every man should put to himself. The expulsion of Memory from the service of the Church is an act of sacrilege. Praise is incomplete, without recollection. Our hallelujah, though apparently an utterance of rapture, will be louder and sweeter in proportion to the critical accuracy and large comprehensiveness of our memory. So we find Samuel beginning at the beginning,—with Moses and Aaron, and the deliverance from Egypt, and “all the righteous acts of the Lord, which he did to you and to your fathers;” Jacob is not forgotten, nor are any of the errors of Israel omitted, nor their consequent subjugation and cruel punishment, their bondage under the Philistines, and their sufferings under the hand of the King of Moab. On and on the great story rolls, up to the times of Jerubbaal, and Bedan, and Jephthah, and Samuel himself; nay, the very last act which they themselves had witnessed is pressed into the great body of the accumulated evidence, and then the appeal is launched upon the judgment and conscience of the people. Consider what that appeal must be to-day if we take in the whole horizon of human history! This is literally impossible, but morally it lies within our power to make noble use of it. The world itself could not contain the books if all providential acts were minutely recorded; but the very fact of the literal impossibleness of the exercise constitutes a direct appeal to the spiritual imagination, which in its highest moods can unite all the courses of providence, and

shape them into one sublime and holy appeal. Let this be done, and the judgment will be supported, conscience will be inspired, and the heart will be excited into new enthusiasm of trust and consecration.

“Now therefore behold the king whom ye have chosen, and whom ye have desired! and, behold, the Lord hath set a king over you. If ye will fear the Lord, and serve him, and obey his voice, and not rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you continue following the Lord your God: but if ye will not obey the voice of the Lord, but rebel against the commandment of the Lord, then shall the hand of the Lord be against you, as it was against your fathers. Now therefore stand and see this great thing, which the Lord will do before your eyes. Is it not wheat harvest to day? I will call unto the Lord, and he shall send thunder and rain; that ye may perceive and see that your wickedness is great, which ye have done in the sight of the Lord, in asking you a king. So Samuel called unto the Lord; and the Lord sent thunder and rain that day: and all the people greatly feared the Lord and Samuel. And all the people, said unto Samuel, Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not: for we have added unto all our sins this evil, to ask us a king. And Samuel said unto the people, Fear not: ye have done all this wickedness: yet turn not aside from following the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. And turn ye not aside: for then should ye go after vain things, which cannot profit nor deliver; for they are vain. For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people. Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you: but I will teach you the good and the right way: only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you. But if ye shall still do wickedly, ye shall be consumed, both ye and your king” (vv. 13-25).

With this appeal the function of teacher in Israel would almost seem to cease. Samuel avails himself of the old man's right to review the course of the nation's history, and to found certain appeals upon it. A younger man might have been interrupted in this historical review and moral application; but the venerable prophet seemed to have acquired a right to make the last great speech to his people. It was a kind of farewell sermon. Nor is it weakened by mere sentiment, or turned into an occasion of self-gratulation in any impious sense. It is the speech of a judge and a great man. Samuel accepts the monarchy, and calls upon the people to behold their king, and to see in that king an answer to their own desire. Samuel does not commit himself to the absolute righteousness of this choice of a king; but with

marvellous sagacity points out that the people themselves had wished to have a king, and that God had so far granted the popular desire. But the presence of a king was not to dispossess the Lord of his throne in Israel. Samuel does not remit the nation to secondary authority, telling the people to await the decrees of the king that they may know the limits of duty and the bounds of responsibility. To Samuel's reverent mind the kingship did not displace the theocracy. In the fourteenth verse Samuel directs the attention of the people to the Lord, and calls upon them to serve him, and obey his voice, and take heed unto his commandment, and then promises them consequent reward. This is a very remarkable point in the grand appeal. Samuel clings to the eternal theocratic idea. It is God who must reign ; it is God who must be for a man or against a man ; it is God who can send forth great signs, and it is to the Lord all kings must look, if they would reign in righteousness and have honour in heaven. That such was Samuel's great conviction is proved by his performance of a miracle that day, in the sight of all the people. Even in the midst of wheat harvest he called upon the Lord to send thunder and rain, that he might himself testify that his throne was in the heavens, and that the crowning of Saul in nowise interfered with the glory of his crown and the completeness of his empire. The people themselves took a highly religious view of the occasion, and instinctively turned to Samuel that he might pray for them a kind of final prayer. This was the proper ending of a grand ministry. In putting the request to Samuel that he would pray for them, the people seemed to expunge the long record of waywardness and ingratitude. There was a turning of the heart in the right direction, and that turning was accepted as repentance and restitution.

Now comes the word of comfort, the great and holy word which is befitting for old age to speak to a new nation. A wickedness had been committed in asking for a king ; still, that wickedness would be regarded as official rather than personal, if the people themselves would see to it that their hearts were kept right, and that their purpose was to serve the Lord with steadfastness of love. A distinction is made between official

mistakes and personal transgressions. How otherwise than upon this ground could God spare even the nations which are called by the Christian name? Then Samuel utters a very tender word; he is about to retire from the priesthood and the official guardianship of Israel, but he says, "God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you" (v. 23). There is a private ministry by which every man can help his nation. Who knows how many priests there are in any country, who are obscurely, but sincerely praying to God that the land may be saved, that war may be averted, and that the ground may be fruitful in harvest-time? When we resign our public functions we may still be able to continue a private ministry. Samuel says he will not only pray for the people: he will teach them the good and the right way. In the presence of the regular authority of a royal power, surrounded by all the pomp and show of a great soldiery, the office held by Samuel must fall into secondary importance. But the teacher says he will still continue his instruction. Though Samuel practically ceased to be judge, he was determined to continue as a prophet. Here is the great function of men who have the prophetic gift. They cannot fight, they cannot make great proposals in the state, they cannot attract the attention of nations, they cannot command a field of battle; but they can constantly teach the good and the right way, they can protest against evil, they can rebuke injustice, they can cry shame upon oppression, they can call people back from negligence, dissoluteness, worldliness, and hold up evermore before the attention of the world great examples, and turn to moral account all the events which give vividness and significance to human history. The world may be poor by the loss of its kings, but it will be infinitely poorer by the removal of its prophets.

SAUL'S EARLY EFFORTS.

I Samuel xiii., xiv.

IN these two chapters we have an opportunity of seeing how Saul betook himself to his kingly work. He did not rush upon his office in indecent haste. We have seen that after his anointing he returned to pursue his usual avocations, and that only upon receiving a special summons from men in distress did he arise to vindicate his true position in Israel. Having overthrown Nahash the Ammonite and received a renewal of the kingdom at Gilgal, it appears that Saul rested one year, in the sense of quietly reigning over the people and carefully laying to heart the entire situation occupied by his rejoicing subjects. Who can describe the joys of the first year of assured honour and responsibility! During that period of anticipation what dreams delight the vision, what holy vows sanctify the heart, what splendid images of social and general beneficence gladden the mind! Why should not the first year be a type of all the years that are yet to come? Yet it is only a time of rest, preparation, and discipline. Saul's two years of quiet kingship saw him become at their close a most energetic and aggressive monarch. This is the danger of kingship as well as its occasional duty. Officers are bound to make work for themselves in order to justify their position. So kings may sometimes feel called upon to enter into military operations, merely to show that theirs is no nominal royalty, but a living dignity bound to demonstrate its strength and majesty. What is the use of being a king if one cannot dazzle the other nations of the earth by unimagined resources worthy of a supreme throne? Nothing is more likely to be misunderstood by rude heathenism than quietness. The undisciplined mind makes no distinction between tranquillity and cowardice. It believes in spirited policies, spectacular displays, floating banners, resounding trumpets, and flashing steel.

Apart from this the uncultured mind can see no royalty worth recognising, and the danger is that even true kings may be tempted to answer such folly in its own way, and thus to incur peril and cost to the most disastrous degree. It must be remembered that Saul was a young king, that he was in very deed the first king in Israel, wholly without experience, yet a man of like passions with all that had ever been called to lofty social position. It is easy now to criticise Saul, and to say what he should have done under the various circumstances which constituted the atmosphere of his times; but we shall display a more magnanimous judgment if we regard him as an infant king, and make large allowances for his being the first monarch in Israel. How all first men have suffered for the race! Surely, it was an awful thing to have been the first man, and a scarcely less trying thing to have been the first sovereign of any people! It would indeed be a shame to kings nowadays, and to all men of lofty office and authority, if they attempted to justify themselves by the mistakes and follies of the pioneers of history. Men in these later days should show all the virtues of their predecessors, and none of their vices, and should show the virtues themselves in their noblest proportions.

We are now face to face with the first war which Saul in his completed kingship undertook. What if it should be a record of recklessness, ambition, usurpation, and no small amount of folly? The wonder would be were it otherwise. In many instances we ought to be more surprised by the wisdom of men than by their unwisdom; yet how prone we are to point out their mistakes and accumulate them into a heavy indictment rather than to stand in amazement before their sagacity and self-control, and praise those qualifications as unexpected but most honourable characteristics. The spiritual application of this incident teaches us that every man in the Church is a soldier acting under divine leadership, or human leadership divinely appointed, and that the solemn and unchangeable duty of the great army is to make daily aggression upon the whole camp of evil. The very existence of that camp should be regarded as a challenge. There need be no waiting for formal defiance; the Christian army is justified in regarding the existence of any

form or colour of evil as a call to immediate onslaught. We fight not against men, but against their corruptions. We do not kill our brother men, we seek by divine instrumentalities to slay the evils which have debased their manhood. There must be war in the world until all evil is driven out of it. Physical carnage is incompatible with the Spirit of Christ, and is, therefore, ever to be regarded with horror and inexpressible detestation ; but the grand spiritual war is never to cease until the last black spot of wickedness is taken away from the fair robe of the moral creation.

In contrast to the energetic and aggressive monarch, we have now to look at a panic-stricken people. "When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were distressed) . . . as for Saul he was yet in Gilgal ; and all the people followed him trembling." It has been thought by some that the trembling refers to the Philistines ; but of this we see no proof in the narrative. The Philistines were accustomed to war. Their chariots were thirty thousand ; their horsemen were six thousand, and the people were as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude (xiii. 5) ; it was not likely, therefore, that a people so vast and so accustomed to war under their kings and princes should be immediately struck by panic. The picture presented by Israel is remarkable for its light and shade. Look at King Saul in the first flush of royal pride and ambition, responding to what he believed to be a divine vocation, and aboundingly confident of immediate and complete success ; he was a man who regarded his own progress as the rush of a mighty wind, and looked upon his sword as the very lightning of God. But his people were unaccustomed to his leadership ; many a stout battle had Israel fought, and not a few victories had Israel won, but in this case a new element enters into the calculation. It is true that Saul had overwhelmed Nahash ; but compared with the Philistines gathered in their full strength Nahash was indeed a contemptible foe. On the other side, therefore, we have a misgiving people, faint-hearted, filled with the distracting fear which weakens all whom it agitates, and trembling with apprehension. If the case had to be argued from the condition of the people, no special sagacity would be required

to predict the result. Is it not so also in the great moral conflict of the world? Judging by what is seen in the spirit and action of nominal Christians, who could justly regard them as men of intrepidity and invincible resoluteness? What trembling, what hesitation, what nightmare fancies, what ghostly noises in the night, what nameless spectres have combined to make the Church afraid! What a genius the Church has for creating fears! How afraid the Church is of sensationalism, offending the weak, annoying the sensitive, disturbing the slumbering! What wonder if amid all this unworthy hesitation the war should be going against the divine standard! But we must not look at the people: our eyes must be upon the Captain of our salvation. In his heart there is no misgiving; he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet; he never turns back from the war; his sword is always highest in the air, pointing the road to danger and to victory.

It is no injustice to say that to-day the Church is trembling in face of the scepticism, the selfishness, the cupidity, and the unspiritual philosophy, which signalise the times. Blessed are we, even in the midst of all this faint-heartedness, if we can get one glimpse of Christ as he himself presses on to the point where the fight is deadliest, and grows in strength as the battle grows in fierceness.

We now come upon one of the mistakes of Saul's first campaign. He had been ordered to go down to Gilgal before Samuel (x. 8): "And behold, I will come down unto thee, to offer burnt offerings, and to sacrifice sacrifices of peace offerings." Saul was to wait in Gilgal seven days for the coming of the prophet. A remarkable point should be noted here, namely, that Samuel even after his valedictory address did not wholly abandon his supremacy in Israel. Saul waited as he supposed the seven days, and then in his impatience he commanded to have brought to him a burnt offering and peace offerings, and he then by his own hand, or by the hand of the priest who was with him, offered the burnt offering. Alas for Saul! No sooner had an end been made of offering the burnt offering than behold Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him that he might salute him. But Samuel was an earnest man, and as such he

immediately questioned Saul as to the sacrifices. Saul justified himself on the ground that Samuel did not come within the appointed time, and as the case appeared to be urgent he ventured to command the offering of the sacrifices. Samuel was, however, within the time, for he came on the evening of the seventh day, thus testing the patience of Saul to the very extremity. But providences would be no tests did they not keep us waiting even to the last moment. Had Samuel come on the morning of the seventh day Saul's confidence would not have been subjected to a complete trial. Saul was now to be taught that to be really royal a man must first be really loyal. Obedience is the first condition of rulership. There was no need for this usurpation of the priestly office on the part of Saul. It is at this point that so many mistakes are made, that men will imagine that the cause of God is in necessity, and will rush in a spirit of usurpation to do the work which God himself has undertaken to be done by other hands. When will men learn to stand still, and in holy patience await the coming of the Lord? When will men give up the self-idolatry which supposes that unless they undertake to quicken the movements of Providence, the destinies of the universe will be imperilled? The worship of patience may be more accepted than the service of rashness. Though, however, the judgment of Heaven was pronounced against Saul, it was not intended to take immediate effect. This is a point to be often noticed in the reading of Scripture: that which we think to be imminent may be distantly perspective; but the one thing that is imminent beyond all question is the infinite displeasure of God in regard to every sinful and foolish deed. The judgment may be held back and long delayed in mercy and patience, but no evil can escape divine penalty. We are reaping every day harvests sprung from seed sown long years ago. We wonder that this or that judgment should have happened to-day, forgetting that no judgment arises, except out of a sequence which we ourselves began, the criminal misfortune being that we forget the seed-time in which we were so busy, and only see the black harvest which we are bound to cut down and appropriate.

In the fourteenth chapter we see on the part of Jonathan what may be described as a disorderly courage. Jonathan undertook

to make a movement on his own part without seeking the advice or sanction of his father. We must not too hardly blame Jonathan, for if his father was a young king, he himself was a young man who had yet all his honours to win. Disorderly courage has often been crowned with successes, and has therefore presented a strong temptation to ill-controlled natures. Free lances have unquestionably done good service in many a man, physical and moral. At the same time there ought to be a great central authority in all well-conducted operations. Room should always be left for genius, and for those sudden impulses of the soul which it is sometimes impossible to distinguish from inspiration : but taking the rank and file, and looking upon the Church as a whole, it will be found that a quiet exercise of discipline and a steady pursuit of paths of order will answer best in the great issue. In the Church, let us repeat, room should be found for all sorts of men : for the great king and the young soldier, for the flashing genius and the slow-moving mind.

This action on the part of Jonathan brought him into trouble. Saul knew that some one was missing, and after going through a process of inquiry and numbering it was found that Jonathan and his armour-bearer were not present. In his eager impetuosity Saul had adjured the people saying, "Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies" (xiv. 24). Jonathan was unaware of the order, so in going through a wood where there was honey upon the ground, Jonathan put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes were enlightened. On being informed of the order of the king, Jonathan denounced the action of Saul, and in very deed it was irrational and intolerable. Afterwards when a lot was drawn between Saul and Jonathan, Jonathan was taken, and on being interrogated he confessed saying, "I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and lo, I must die." But the people would not have it so. The king was taught that day his first lesson as to the power of the democracy. Even kings must under some circumstances be the subjects of their people. Israel was at that juncture a people to be found ready. Their appeal

was nobly conceived and nobly expressed. "And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? God forbid: as the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with God this day" (xiv. 45). Trust the people. There are occasions on which the proverb is true: *Vox populi, vox Dei*. The instincts of a great people are never to be lightly treated. Saul might on this occasion indeed be secretly inclined to concur with the popular verdict, but whether he was or not, the popular verdict, in so far as it is right, must always overrule the arbitrary and oppressive decrees of kings.

We have reserved for a concluding paragraph a memorable incident recorded in the fourteenth chapter. Dealing as we now are with the early efforts of Saul, we must point out with especial vividness that in connection with this war Saul built his first altar: "And Saul built an altar unto the Lord: the same was the first altar that he built unto the Lord" (v. 35). Some have regarded this as an act kindred to the service which Samuel condemned. Whether that may be so or not in a technical sense, the fact of the altar being the "first altar" is full of beautiful significance. We read in the Gospel of John of the first miracle that Jesus did. In Genesis we have read of Abraham returning to the altar which he built at the first. What a noble vision is opened up by the very words—first altar, first miracle, first war, first victory. Some of us have not yet begun to build an altar. Some of us have not sat down for the first time at the table of the Lord. Some of us have yet to make a real beginning in life! Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.

1 Samuel xv. 11.

"It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king : for he is turned back from following me, and hath not performed my commandments."

SAUL REJECTED.

THIS is a decisive word, and a good reason is given for its being spoken. God is said to "repent" when, for moral reasons, he sets aside arrangements which he had appointed. The change is not in God, it is in man : all the government of God is founded upon a moral basis ; when moral conditions have been impaired or disturbed, God's relation to the matter in question is of necessity changed ; and this change, justified by such reasons, could not be more conveniently or indeed more accurately expressed than by the word *repentance*.

Saul hardly begins his reign when, somehow or other, he gets wrong. He seems to be unable to take hold of anything by the right end. There is a mist before his eyes which causes him to mistake distances and proportions ; and there is a crookedness in his judgment which brings him to false conclusions whenever he tries the simplest process of reasoning. He was told to remain in Gilgal for seven days. As Samuel did not come within that period, Saul became impatient, and, by vehemence of self-will, sought to recover ground which he supposed himself to have lost. Samuel addressed him in language of terrible severity : "Thou hast done foolishly : thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee : . . . but now thy kingdom shall not continue" (xiii. 14). The anger seems to be out of proportion to the offence. Saul was impatient, and therefore he lost his kingdom. Saul disobeyed upon a point which did not appear to be of vital importance, and therefore he was to be deposed. This was very summary ; so much so, that we

feel inclined to rebel against it. We see something of the same thing in the life that is around us. Men are suddenly brought down from high and dignified positions. They are brought into desolation as in a moment ; and yet we are at a loss to see cause enough for the angry visitation of God. No doubt they have been imperfect, but so are all men : no doubt they have sinned ; but in this they have the example of the whole world to plead. The fact is, that we do not see the whole of any case. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." This is our confidence, that every stroke of divine judgment is proportioned to the guilt upon which it falls, and, though we cannot see the proportion now, God will cause us hereafter to see that his judgments have been true and righteous altogether.

We shall now see more deeply into the character of Saul than we have yet done. We have before us a detailed account of one transaction ; sometimes into one act we put the quality of our whole character ; and one day may sometimes be taken as a condensation of an entire lifetime. There are single acts which gather up into themselves the processes of many years. One cry of anguish may tell the tragic story of a wasted life. In this case, Saul was commanded to "go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not ; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass." Such was the commandment : what was the result ? This : "Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them ; but everything that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly" (xv. 3, 9).

What are the lessons with which the narrative is charged ?

1. The danger of mistaking partial for complete obedience. "Blessed be thou of the Lord : I have performed the commandment of the Lord."

(a) God requires literal obedience.

(b) God's language never exceeds God's meaning.

(c) Conscience is seen most clearly in minute obedience.

2. The possibility of giving a religious reason for an act of disobedience. "The people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God."

(a) One duty must not be performed on the ruins of another. It was a duty to sacrifice, but sacrifice must not be offered upon disobedience.

(b) God's commandment must not be changed by men's afterthought. Lucky ideas, sudden inspirations, and the like, mean ruin, unless well tested.

3. The danger of being seduced into disobedience by social clamour. "I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice."

(a) The people who tempt are not the people who can save.

(b) Where God has spoken distinctly, there should be no human consultation.

4. The certain withdrawal of the best influences of life, as the result of disobedience. "And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death." Parents, ministers, friends, gone!

There are some incidental points of application :

(1) Sin discovers itself: "What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the cattle which I hear?"

(2) Sin will be punished. Four hundred years elapsed before the sword fell upon Amalek (Deut. xxv. 17, 19). Time has no effect upon moral distinctions, or moral judgments.

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, we have no fear, because thou art on the throne. Thy power is infinite, thy mercy endureth for ever. With our whole hearts' love we say, Thy will be done. Deliver us from all self-trust. Help us to put our whole confidence in the Living One, who was, and is, and who yet will come to judge the world. May this day be to us as the Sabbath of the Lord; a time of rest and spiritual refreshment. May our souls know themselves to be near the Lord, and according to our manifold wants do thou command thy blessing to rest upon us, through Jesus Christ our Saviour. Redeem us from all worldliness, all selfishness, all debasement, all fear. Establish us in thy holy love. Lord, increase our faith. Answer the cry of our heart when we appeal to thee for the pardon of our sins. We come to thee through the appointed way; we stand beside the holy cross; we look to the one sacrifice. Fill our hearts with joy whilst we tarry at the cross. The Lord hear us, and from the hill of heaven send us answers of peace! We pray evermore in the name of God the Son. Amen.

1 Samuel xvi. 12.

"Arise, anoint him: for this is he."

DAVID ANOINTED.

SAMUEL, the venerable and almost outworn prophet, would have made a mistake upon this occasion. When he looked upon Eliab, he said, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him." It is clear, therefore, that even inspired and honoured prophets were not, in themselves, infallible. It would further appear that their inspiration was occasionally suspended. Now and again natural judgment interposed its opinion. Now and again the natural sense spoke first, without allowing the spiritual sense to lead the way. So when Samuel saw Eliab, he was struck by the natural nobleness and majesty of the young man's appearance, and said, "Surely this is the king of the Lord's choice." This notion of Samuel's is most instructive. He saw the king in Eliab's form, and he inferred that the kingliness of his stature came from the kingliness of his soul. It ought to be, surely, that outward greatness should be the expression of inward greatness;

otherwise how horrible a contradiction man may become ! Evidently so. A man towering in stature, yet pining away in soul ! A fine, noble, manly bearing, inspired, if inspired at all, by a spirit which has cut itself off from the divine and eternal ! The man thus becomes a living lie. He becomes, too, the occasion of many mistakes on the part of others. Young men, fascinated by his outward appearance, infer that it must be safe to follow the lead of such a noble. Unsuspecting men, looking upon his openness and candour of countenance, may say, "Surely this man was made to be trusted ;" others may be caught by the same reasoning, and so a man of certain form and aspect may be unconsciously misleading and seriously injuring his fellows.

Appearances ought to mean something. If a man has a noble physical appearance, that appearance ought to carry with it some moral significance. If it does not, the man himself should retire into his own heart, and ask himself a plain question or two. Did God fashion palaces for dwarfs ? The man should inquire whether God intended that his outward nobleness of form and aspect should be inconsistent with his inner and better life ? Ought not the natural to be the expression of the spiritual ? Ought a man to have a noble head, and nothing in it—great physical power, and no power of soul—an open, beautiful countenance, yet the heart of a hypocrite or the soul of a villain ? As with personal appearance, so with social appearance. Our outward figure in society ought to mean something good ; something according to the measure of its greatness, and the intensity of its splendour. Shall a man live in a great house, and be surrounded by all the signs of luxury and advanced civilisation, and yet that appearance fail to denote that the inhabitant of that house and the owner of that property is a man of the noblest charity, and that what is round about him is but a poor figure and dim emblem of the reality of his spirit, and the inexhaustibleness of his love ? A man ought not to feel himself at liberty to be inconsistent, to exhibit a daily discrepancy between his appearance and his reality, whether it be his personal appearance or his social appearance. If he has been gifted, either in one way or another, with great and notable outward

blessings, those gifts ought to lead him to the consideration of questions of intellectual and moral culture ; so that the outward, however great and impressive, may be but a feeble indication of inward wealth, the richness of his knowledge, the depth and truth, the purity and gentleness, of his soul !

On the other hand, there is a higher law. There is a law which takes us clear out of the realm of appearances. All men have not Eliab's kingliness of image, and majesty of bearing. There are dwarfs, cripples, deformed men, men whose figure is against them, whose outward appearance may lead people to form the most erroneous conclusions regarding the quality and temper of their souls. So we come for our relief and teaching to this higher law which says, "Look not on his appearance. The Lord seeth not as man seeth ; man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." So, whilst our subject appeals to those who are favoured with outward beauty and external majesty, it also has a message for those who have no such physical and external advantages. It says, True beauty is beauty of the heart ; true greatness is greatness of the mind ; abiding majesty is moral majesty ; what thou art in reality, thou art in thy soul ! The bloom shall be taken off thy cheek, the lustre shall be dimmed in thine eye ; the sap shall be taken out of thy bodily strength : moral elements, spiritual qualities, spiritual beauties,—these survive all wrecks, these grow, these increase in lustre, beauty, and worth ; these, partaking of the very nature and quality of God, shall abide through the ages of his own eternity !

Turning specially to the anointing of David, we shall regard it in its bearing upon the divine law of election, which is so mysteriously, yet so certainly and inexorably working amidst the affairs of men. Looking at that law within the limits of the present instance, two things are plain. It is plain, first, that the law of divine election pays no regard to human prejudices. There is, for example, a prejudice in favour of appearance. Samuel himself was the subject of that prejudice. When a man of towering physical stature, great breadth, and sublime aspect came before him, he, though a spiritual man, and a specially

called prophet of the Lord, said, "Surely this kingly man must be the king of the Lord's choice." We may, too, have prejudices as respects age. We rightly say that age should speak, that a multitude of days should teach wisdom, that a man who has come to maturity, or grey hairs, has a right to a certain measure of social supremacy. There is, too, a prejudice as regards employment. We infer that because a man has been brought up in a lowly employment, therefore he is not qualified for high rule, for supreme command. Now as Samuel had the one prejudice, Jesse had the other. When Samuel asked if there was not another son, Jesse said to him, "that the youngest yet remained," pronouncing perhaps the word *youngest* so as to throw suspicion into the bare conjecture that one so young should be at all likely to ascend the throne of Israel. Not only did Jesse describe David as the youngest, but he described him also as keeping sheep. "He was but a shepherd, he watched his father's flock;" and to the mind of Jesse it seemed an impossible thing that a man could step from the shepherd's office to a royal position. Yet the Lord said of David, coming in fresh from the mountains, ruddy as the morning, strong as a youth sent down from heaven, "Arise, anoint him: for this is he;" thus setting aside human prejudices, and working according to a law which never has been sanctioned by the merely natural reason of mankind.

By calling unlikely men to the front, God humbles human judgment. No man can arise and say, "This is the Lord's chosen one," or "That ought to be the specially honoured servant of the Most High." Not the keenest, wisest, strongest of us is entitled to say who shall be sent on the Lord's errands. We are ruled by prejudices, we are oftentimes victims of appearances. We see form, not soul,—hands, not hearts. We draw conclusions from things seen and temporal. God hushes all our voices, and says, "I am the Lord; I will send by whom I will send: the work is mine, and the Master must choose the servants." So again and again we are thrown back from our most cautious reasoning, our most prudent conclusions, and God is every day in the Church and elsewhere giving our proud intellect the lie; saying to our penetration, "Thou art blind;" saying to our judgment, "Thou art foolish, thou knowest not the

measure of the case ; and when thou hast pronounced thine own opinion, thou hast but betrayed thine own incapacity and folly ! ”

God also keeps the world in constant expectation by calling unlikely men to do the chief of his work in society. We know not who may be called. “What I say unto one, I say unto all, Watch.” We cannot tell but that the man who has been sitting on the outside, year after year, may be the very next to be called to the front, entrusted with high commissions, inspired to do the Lord’s work amongst men. We ought, therefore, to live as those who are expecting messages from the Most High. At any moment he may speak to us by combinations of events which may take place with startling suddenness. He can alter our position in society, so that the man who was yesterday obscure may to-morrow be set on the very pinnacle of the social fabric, and he whose opinion was yesterday despised may rule the judgment of men to-morrow. Our life is thus redeemed from monotony, and saved from suicidal insipidity. The Lord is round about us, and at any moment he may charge us with his messages, and clothe us with his power !

By calling unlikely men to the front, God equalises the conditions of society. Suppose for one moment that all men were called from one class. What a change would take place in our social relations ! What pride would inspire some people—what despair would chill and darken others ! But God is continually working by a sovereign law, which we cannot understand, but which always vindicates its own mercifulness, as well as shows its infinite wisdom. Are the rich and the mighty and the noble always called to do the chief work in society ? Has not God sometimes gone forth that he might call the gatherer of sycamore fruit to do his work in Israel ; that he might call Elisha from the plough to speak the messages of his wisdom and love ; and that he might call great men from lowliest and obscurest positions to do some great work for him ? Thus society is equalised. One man is born to great social position ; he rules and sways. Another, born in poverty and obscurity, is called to discover, to enter upon great projects, to develop sublime schemes. Thus God equalises one aristocracy with another, and daily teaches us

that no man is to be despised ; that in the lowliest of his creatures he can set up his temple, if he will !

See then the graciousness of the law of sovereign election. We lay the whole stress of the emphasis in this sentence upon the word *graciousness*. We do not speak of the majesty, the grandeur, the impressiveness, and sublimity of the law. But in this law of sovereign election, daily at work amidst the affairs of men, we discover infinite graciousness, beneficence, compassion. The law has not only a sublime side, but a side which appeals to our emotions, to our gratitude, to our confidence. God's strength is the measure of God's love. So the Christian should say : Had I any choice in the matter, I should prefer that God should elect to rule according to his own counsel without ever consulting me. In so far as I believe that he is infinite in wisdom, in power, in love, in righteousness, in so far would I disclaim any right to participate in his counsels, and should shrink from the responsibility of having anything to do with determining my own life, merely as a question of selfish calculation and policy ; whilst with my whole heart would I say to my Father in heaven, "Thy will be done !" I would pray him to save me from consultation ; I would appeal to him not to make me a party to a decision ; I would be his servant, his agent, his son. I am but an insect born yesterday. What shall I say to the eternal and infinite God ? I say, "Do not ask me ; do not consult me ; thou knowest all ; let me find my liberty in thy sovereignty ; let me find my freedom in thy rule ; what thou doest, infinite, living One, must be best ! I will not ask to be taken into the secret place of thy tabernacle, to be consulted ; only fill me with thy light, and inspire me with thy love." Thus the great law of election is not a terror, nor does it disclose mere arbitrariness of will. It shows that there can be but one Lord ; and in so far as we can say, "The Lord reigneth," our life is a continual sabbath !

It is plain from this instance, in the second place, that the law of divine election proves itself in spiritual gifts. We read, "The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward." The same thing we see in the case of Saul, upon whom the Spirit of the Lord came, and of whom we read, "The Lord gave him

another heart." So it was with Joshua: "And the Lord said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him." In like manner we read that "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." So with Samson the strong man: "The Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson at times in the camp of Dan." It is of supreme importance that this side of the doctrine be understood; so that the law of divine election may be saved from abuse. The law of divine election vindicates itself in spiritual expression on the part of those who are divinely elected. How is a man to show his election? Not by pretension. The most solemn assertion on his part that he is called of God to do the work, amounts to nothing, considered in itself. A man may declare most solemnly and resolutely that he has a charge from God to reveal certain truths, to undertake certain offices, to do a specific work; and yet his emphatic asseveration may go for nothing. How, then, is a man to prove his divine election? Not by contemptuous treatment of other workers. Whatever be our gifts, we are not at liberty to treat with contempt those who are doing Christian work, or right work of any kind whatsoever, in Church or State, in the market-place, or in the household. The divinely elected man is a magnanimous man. He rarely has recourse to contempt; when he is contemptuous, it is for moral, not for merely personal, reasons; when he resorts to irony, banter, sarcasm, and contempt, it is in a spirit of righteousness—not that he enjoys the exercise, but that he sees by a vision, quickened and strengthened by God the Holy Ghost, that no other weapons could so successfully do the work to which he is called.

How, then, is a man to prove that he is called of God to do a special work, or to occupy a special position? We answer, distinctly and emphatically, by the purity and force of his spiritual qualifications. Only so far as he has the Holy Ghost is he the elect servant, the representative of God! What of his spirituality? What of his calculation of things that are round about him, things seen and temporal? what of his ideas of truth? Is he at home in the spiritual region—has he keen, piercing insight into things,—true, living, heavenly insight into them? By so much is he the called and crowned servant of the living God! He must declare

his election by his speech,—by its purity, spirituality, heavenliness. When we come near him, we must feel that, though on earth, he is yet in heaven; that though he speaks the language of men, he speaks it in a tone and with an accent which he could only have learned of Jesus Christ and of God the Father! There must be something about him that is not merely physically distinctive, but spiritually distinctive, separating him from all other men, and giving him a bearing and force which could only be derived from long-continued loving fellowship with the unseen, ever-living Lord! “Beloved, believe not every spirit: but try the spirits, whether they are of God.” “Many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ, and shall deceive many.” “Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw disciples after them.” Hence we see that assertion is nothing; great, bold claim is nothing; sublimity of appearance is nothing. The whole question turns upon this: How much of the Holy Ghost is in the heart of a man, who claims to be a teacher sent from God, or a king of men?

An intelligent appreciation of this law of divine sovereign election would be attended by the happiest consequences. Life would no longer be looked upon as an irregular warfare. If we lose grasp of this doctrine life becomes a scramble; the strongest wins, the weakest is knocked to the wall; and as for the spiritual man, the soul that has not lost its sensibility, the man that has ideas of righteousness, truth, and honour—such men must be trampled in the dust. Lay hold of this doctrine, that God is at the centre, God is on the throne, marshalling all forces, and ruling all events; and how confused soever may be present appearances, we shall find a law working itself out which will justify every one who is good, vindicate every righteous claim, confound the wicked, and bear them away upon the whirlwind of divine indignation. Not only will this result follow; but responsibility will be felt to be measurable by proper limitations. All men are not equally responsible before God. Some require to be comforted upon this point, because this great question of responsibility is so heavy to carry; it troubles and overweights them till they can hardly get along at all,—so grievous is their sense of personal responsibility. Tell a man that God gives to every one a certain

number of talents,—five, two, or one. Tell him that from one to whom much has been given, much will be required, and that from one to whom little has been given, little will be required; then he begins to feel the justness, the equity, and graciousness of the living Lord. God gave us our original dowry, and from that point we must work out the sum of our responsibility. Our one talent will not be expected to be multiplied into ten; our five talents will be expected to grow in proportion to their original number and quality. So there is righteousness at the heart of things. God's judgment-seat is a judgment-seat of light, truth, and equity; and no man hath occasion to fear it, who has served God, and worshipped him in spirit and in truth. There will also be another result. Mutual honour will be unmingled with personal envy. We are not all equal, to begin with. God intended some to have great talents, and others to have but feeble gifts. God called some men to work at the front, and he intended other men to do a lowly, obscure, unseen work. God created yonder singing, shining poet, and God set another man down amongst the prosaic thinkers,—men who could see no further than a fact, and had little power of coming far into the empire of truth; yet who were firm and sound within the limit and region of fact. Shall we envy the great man? Surely not. He was made of God; he is honoured of our Father,—we will glorify God in him. Such will be the conclusion to which we shall come, if we believe with all our heart that God is on the throne; and that he doeth in all these things, which are beyond our control, according, not only to the pleasure of his will, but the infinitude of his righteousness.

No man is elected to badness of character. God never called a man to wickedness. The whole tone of biblical teaching is against a theory so monstrous. We read of election to righteousness, of calls to high offices and noble functions, but we never read of God electing a man to hell! As to this matter of election, we would to God that some who object to it were as common-sense in this question as they are in the daily actions of ordinary life! We ask no higher degree of common-sense. Let us assume that a purse has been lost—a purse containing a thousand guineas; and whoever finds it may keep it. "Ha!"

we say, "well, only one can find it; therefore what is the use of a thousand seeking it? Only one can have it; and if I am elected to be the man, it will come in my way." We never heard people reasoning so with regard to an affair of that kind. Though only one may have it, ten thousand would strive for it, if they know the conditions. There is a prize to be given in a school. It is one prize; there are five hundred scholars in the school. The boys say, "Well, only one of us can get it, why should five hundred of us be toiling and fagging for it?" Another boy says, "I know if I am to have the prize, I shall get it; so I shall read no books, and make no preparation." You would not allow a boy to reason so. Yet there are men who say this, "If we are called to heaven, we'll get to heaven; if we are elected to be saved, we need not make any effort about it." "Thou wicked and slothful servant: out of thine own mouth I condemn thee;" the whole action of thy evil life shall be thy answer on the day of judgment, and thou shalt be condemned to an ignominious silence because of a self-accusing conscience.

With God upon the throne, why should we be distressed by unhappy appearances and unwelcome rumours? The Lord reigneth; that is enough. Seated above all forms and all forces, holding the royal sceptre, is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The armies of heaven are his loving servants. The forces of creation are measured and controlled by his gracious power. Children of earth cannot go beyond the line he has marked. He maketh the wrath of man to praise him, and the remainder of the wrath of men he doth restrain. Such thoughts bring the soul into holy quietness. They sustain our hope when the day is cloudiest and the night is filled with darkness. They rebuke our impatience and murmuring, and bid us nestle closer to our Father's heart. The sovereignty of the Lord is the security of all goodness. Destroy sovereignty and you inaugurate confusion. What would be our poor human life, were God to leave the throne, and allow us to go our own way, and do our own bidding? Truly then we should be far away on the wild waters, without captain or friend, and without hope of home. Blessed One, known to us through the great cross, leave not the throne; but rule us, work in us, have us in thy holy keeping!

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, thou art always showing us thy goodness. We have said in many a song of adoring praise, "Goodness and mercy have followed us all the days of our life." Saying this, the whole earth has become the house of the Lord. We have consecrated every part of the habitable globe by songs of praise and by utterances of adoration and trust. "Behold, this is none other than the house of God," we have said, as great religious emotions have arisen in our hearts and ennobled our whole spirit by their pathos. We will now sing of judgment and mercy; we will make mention of thy loving-kindness; and thy providential care shall be the subject of our song. Thou hast watched our uprising and our down-sitting, our going out and our coming in, and from the high hills thou hast sent us help every day, so that we have been lifted out of the low place, amid the cold wind and the stifling cloud, right up into bright places and into the sunlight and the music of better worlds. Thou hast disappointed our fear, as surely as thou hast exceeded our hope. We have not recognised our little prayer in thy great answer. Thou hast swallowed up our poor cry in all the bounteousness of thy great response. If our prayer was sown a little seed, thine answer has come to us as a great tree. Behold, how good thou art! How infinite in tenderness! How eternal in patience! How mighty is the delivering arm of God! We will comfort ourselves with these words, being entitled to apply them by the grace that is in our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom alone we have come to know thee in all the loftiest and tenderest aspects of thy character. He has taught us to call thee Father, Father in heaven, and he has given to us visions of thy bounty and love which put out the brightness of the sun by their infinite glow. So we stand as children at home in the presence of the Father, and the table of his bounty, confessing our unworthiness; but whilst the confession is yet staining our lips, behold, thou art arraying us in the best robe and making our finger rich with the ring of thy love. "How good is the Lord!" our souls will say, startled into the gracious exclamation by many a sacred surprise. The high hill has been brought within easy ascent when we have come to it because of the presence of the Lord, and the rest of soul by which that presence has been testified. The stone has been rolled away from the door of the sepulchre when we have come to it; for who can outrun the angels, and be first at the scene of battle? Behold, thou art always first. We can but be second, for we are the creatures of thy hand, we are the sheep of thy pasture. Thou didst dwell in eternity; thou didst come up from the infinite spaces; by new names hast thou come down to us; by the Lord and by Jehovah have we known thee, and then by Father—merciful, pitiful—and Redeemer revealed in thy Son. We will trust thy

mercy, goodness, compassion, and love. There we feel a sense of security ; there our souls fall into sweet peace ; and as for the mysteries which darken around the horizon, we leave them to thee. Thou hast light enough to burn out their darkness, and to fill them with grace and glory. We will think of the past, but not too tearfully, lest we blind ourselves to its best lesson. We will call up the dead, until we know that they are more truly living than we are—a larger life, blessed with celestial liberty. We will look forward with confidence, for all our yesterdays are promises of all our to-morrows, and the Lord who has been known to us by many a name will find a new revelation for every dawning day. We will remember before thee our sick ones. Thou canst heal them with the poor health of time and the eternal health of heaven. Thou wilt remember our travelling friends, tossed on the sea, wandering in new lands, surrounded by unfamiliar associations. Their hearts are here, and yet there, with a divided attention, with a scattered and yearning love. The Lord feed them, lead them, sustain them, wherever they are, and bring them back to their desired haven with new blessings and the sense of new consecration to the living Owner of all souls. We remember the little ones, who can hardly speak their own request or tell their own necessities. We remember all classes and conditions of human life, from the lowest to the highest, from the most plebeian to the most imperial and royal, praying that all may feel themselves to be but men in the Lord's presence, and yet men even in his sight. The Lord send a fire amongst us that shall burn, but not consume. Open our mouths in blessing, in fearless, triumphant praise, and give us a deepening love, a more intense zeal for God, and a clearer view of the cross as the only answer to sin, and the only way to heaven. Amen.

1 Samuel xvii. 58.

"I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

UNDECLARED ROYALTY.

THAT is a very simple account for a man to give of himself, yet it answered the question which elicited it. Though but a stripling, David knew where to stop in his answers. On this occasion he could have startled Saul as Saul was never startled in his life, yet he held his peace ! Truly, there is power in moderation ; and truly, discretion is the supreme beauty of the valiant man. Notice with special care the exciting circumstances under which the answer was given. David stood before Saul with the head of the Philistine in his hand ! Call up the scene ! Look at the sinewy hand grasping the bleeding head of the boastful barbarian ! See the flush upon the cheek of the young conqueror, then listen to the quiet answer ! To be so self-controlled

under such circumstances ! Standing before the king, grasping the head of a man who made Israel quake, a nation looking at him, yet he speaks as if a stranger had accosted him in some peaceful retreat of the pasturage !

Now look at Saul. His position is very touching. Occasionally insane, he is to-day sober-minded and tranquil. Little does he know to whom he is speaking ! David might have said, "Samuel came to my father's house in search of a king. He passed by my brethren one by one ; I was sent for at length from the sheep-fold, and Samuel anointed me king of Israel. Behold in this bleeding head the first sign and pledge of my kingly power !" Instead of speaking so, he merely said, with a child's beautiful simplicity, "I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite."

Learn that men may be anointed long before their power is officially and publicly declared. God may have put his secret into their heart long before he puts the diadem upon their brow. We do not know to whom we are speaking. The child who looks so simple, almost insignificant, may become the man who shall render his age the greatest service, or bring upon it the most appalling ruin. You speak to the little one some gentle word, or bid him God-speed, not knowing that in after-years he may repronounce to a hushed world the convictions for which you could get no hearing, or may honour your memory by a successful vindication of its claim upon grateful regard.

Learn that God's arrangements are not extemporaneous. The men who shall succeed to all good offices are known to him from the beginning to the end. Often in our impatience we concern ourselves to know what will be done in the event of this man dying, or that—the king, the preacher, the prime minister, the commanding soldier. To us the prospect may be dark, but to God the whole course is clear ; the successor is anointed, but not yet declared.

In studying the period of David's history which is comprised between his anointing and the killing of Goliath, we shall discover some qualities in David which we may well imitate.

Soon after his anointing, David became harp-player to the king. This seems to be a descent. Are there not many apparent anti-climaxes in life? Is this a conspicuous example of them? "Play the harp! Why, I am king," David might have said. "Why should I waste my time in attempting to prolong the life of the man who is upon my throne? The sooner he dies, the sooner I shall reign; not one soothing note will I evoke from my harp!" Had David spoken so, he would have dropped from the high elevation which becomes the spirit of a king. There are two ways of looking at this harp-playing. David saw it in its right aspect, and therefore to him it lost all its apparent humiliation. To a mere outsider it was harp-playing; to David it was an attempt to help a man by driving away an evil spirit. In playing the harp David was doing a great spiritual work. He was not trying to please the merely musical ear; he was not the paid servant of taste; he was a spiritual minister, and as such he was as the angel of God to the tormented man. It would help us in our work if we looked at its spiritual rather than at its merely outward aspect. The influence of a spiritual worker never ceases. David's harp is being played still, and its strains are expelling many an evil spirit. Had his work been merely so much manipulation upon a musical instrument, his work would have perished with his physical existence; but David played with his soul as well as with his fingers; hence his strains linger in the air, and find their way into our hearts when weary with much sadness or beclouded by unusual fear. Let us remember that how high soever be the office to which we are anointed, there is no anti-climax in our attempts to redeem men from the power of evil spirits, or in any way, possible to us, to bring men out of the horror of great darkness into the sweet light of hope. Are we skilled in music? Let us help those who are sad. Have we this world's goods? Let us seek out the poor, that they may bless us as the messengers of God. Have we power to say beautiful words? Let us speak to men who are weary of the common tumult which is around them. To help a man is the honour of true kingliness.

After this engagement as harp-player, David went home to pursue his usual avocations. How well he carried the burden of his prospects! We see no sign of impatience. He did not

behave himself as a child who, having seen a toy, cries until it is put into his hands. David had the dignity of patience. He carried the Lord's secret in a quiet heart. Was it not a trial to him to go back to the sheepfold? Had it been so, he would have wrested the word of the Lord to his own destruction. He would then have worked from the point of his own desires rather than from the point of the divine will. In little things as well as in great, men show their temper and quality. One sign of impatience at this point would have shown that David's pride had overcome his moral strength. Who would rule, must learn to obey. Who would be master, must learn first and well the duties of a good servant. Are we conscious of superior powers? Let us show their superiority by the calmness of our patience, and by the repression of every wish that is marred by one element of selfishness.

When David came to see his fighting brethren, by the express instructions of his father Jesse, he disclosed a feature in his character in true keeping with what we have seen. When he had become acquainted with the case, he at once looked at outward circumstances in their moral bearing. Other men, including Saul himself, were talking about mere appearances. They did not see the case as it really was. Their talk, in fact, was strongly atheistic. They whispered to one another, in hot and panting breath, "Why, that staff of his is like a weaver's beam; look at his spear's head, it must weigh at least six hundred shekels of iron: I am told that the weight of his coat is five thousand shekels of brass; as for his height, it must be a span more than six cubits!" This was the talk that was proceeding when David ran into the army to salute his brethren. Is it not barbaric talk after all? It is external, mechanical, superficial. Now for another tone! David called Goliath, not a giant, not a soldier, but an uncircumcised Philistine, who had defied the armies of the living God! This is a moral tone. This is precisely the tone that was wanted in the talk of degenerate Israel! As used by David, the very word *uncircumcised* involved a moral challenge. In effect, David said: "I do not look upon his height; I ask no questions respecting the strength of his muscles, the length of his staff, the circumference of his chest, the swing of his arm; he is an

uncircumcised Philistine, and has defied the armies of the living God ; it is none other than God himself whom the barbarian has defied ; therefore shall judgment fall upon him swiftly, and the hand of the Lord shall tear him in pieces." This tone retrieves the honour of any controversy. It brings strength with it, and hope, and dignity. Israel had fallen away from the right elevation ; the contention had become one of muscle against muscle, of number against number. David said, It is a contention between light and darkness, between right and wrong, between God and the devil ; to your knees, O Israel, and call upon the name of the living God !

Oh for one David in every controversy ! Men lose themselves in petty details, they fight about straws, they see only the surface ; David saw the spiritual bearing of all things, and redeemed a controversy from vulgarity and atheism by distinctly and lovingly pronouncing the name of God. The atheist counts the guns, the saint looks up to God ; the atheist is terrified by the size of the staff, the saint is inspired by his faith in right and purity. Such a man cannot fail. If he could fail, life would be a continual mockery, and hope would be only a variety of despair. Sooner or later what is right must slay what is wrong. If we lose faith in that doctrine, we lose everything in life worth having ; creation itself is unsafe :—

"The pillared firmament is rottenness,
And earth's base built on stubble."

The moral is the true standard of measurement. Look not at Goliath's flesh, but at his soul, and learn how soon that arm withers which is not supported by spiritual strength. Let us copy the moral tone of David ! We cannot copy it mechanically ; it must come out of our heart of hearts, or it will perish in the very act of its expression.

David interpreted the past so as to qualify himself for the future. When Saul doubted his ability to cope with the Philistine, David recounted some of his recollections as a shepherd : "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock : and I went out after him, and smote

him, and delivered it out of his mouth : and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear : and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God. The Lord that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (vv. 34-37). The past should be our prophet. David confided in the unchangeableness of God. Forms of danger vary ; but the delivering power remains the same. Sometimes danger comes as a lion, sometimes as a bear, sometimes as a Philistine, sometimes as a devil. David did not ask what the special form was, he knew that God never changed, and that his power was the same in all cases. We know this right well ; our path is strewn with lions and bears slain in the name of the Lord, yet we are as afraid of the next lion or the next Philistine as if God had never enabled us to smite an enemy ! "Lord, increase our faith." When our theology is right, our power over circumstances will be complete, and our theology is right when the heart's whole trust is in the living Father, and our love goes out towards him through his one Son, Jesus Christ the Saviour. When our hold upon the true idea of God is lost, our life is disorganised and weakened ; when our hold of that idea is firm, we "plant our footsteps in the sea, and ride upon the storm." The great fight of life is a contention between the material and the spiritual. Goliath represents the material ; he is towering in stature, vast in strength, terrible in aspect. David represents the spiritual : he is simple, trustful, reverent ; the merely fleshly side of his power is reduced, to the lowest possible point,—he fights under the inspiration of great memories, in a deeply religious spirit, not for personal glory but for the glory of the living God.

David went to his work in the name and fear of God. "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts." In that one word David disclosed the secret of his power. His mere personality ceased, and he became the minister of God. As a contest between strength and strength, the scene was simply ridiculous. Viewed materially, the Philistine was perfectly right when he disdained David, and scornfully laughed at the weapons which the stripling

produced. Goliath showed a most justifiable contempt; as a materialist, he could indeed have adopted no other tone. David made no boast of his weapons. He pronounced the name of God, and put his life in the keeping of the Most High. It is as if David had said, "My fall will be the fall of God; it is not a fight between thee and me, O strong man; it is a fight between earth and heaven; the victory will not be given to the weapon, but to the hand that wields it; God shall hurl this stone at thee, thou uncircumcised boaster, and before it thou shalt be as a helpless beast."

In the expression, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts," we have a watchword which may be used by true men in all crises. Let us use it in temptation, in times of unjust opposition, in solemn trials of strength and patience; yes, and use it when Death itself challenges us to the combat! That grim monster will one day invite us to contest. He will call us out, that in the open field we may try our strength together. If we go in our own name, we shall be worsted in the fray; to Death itself let us say, "I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts," and death shall be swallowed up in victory.

The application of the truths of this lesson is easy as a matter of inference, but hard as a matter of realisation. Some men save, others are saved. Such is the law of sovereignty. This law of sovereignty penetrates the whole scheme and fabric of life. David saved, Israel was saved; activity and passivity make up the sphere of this life. Without any attempt at fanciful spiritualising, we see in David the type of the one Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ, who bruised the serpent's head, and won for us the one victory through which we may have eternal life. "Crown Him Lord of all."

PRAYER.

ALMIGHTY GOD, who can bear the scourging of the rod that is in thine hand? Thou dost not willingly grieve or afflict the children of men. Thy purpose is directed by eternal love, though thy stroke be sometimes heavier than we can bear. Thou rememberest that we are dust. Our breath is in our nostrils; we hasten away like a cloud in the morning; our days are few before thee. Be merciful unto us, through Jesus Christ, our infinitely sufficient and precious Saviour, and grant that the end of all discipline may be our likeness to the beauty of his holiness. Chasten us, that we may be good, but slay us not with the sword. When we are in the furnace, be thyself our Refiner. When earthly things are plucked out of our hands, may it be that our hearts may be enriched with heavenly treasure. Lord, hear us. Son of God, come to us. Holy Spirit, dwell in us. May the holy word be to us a word of gracious explanation, lest we faint under the mysteries of thy providence. Whilst we pray, our hearts are waiting and watching at the cross. Amen.

1 Samuel xviii. 9.

“And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”

DISCIPLINE.

WE now enter upon scenes which show that long and most painful discipline is compatible with divine election to high office. David had been anointed, yet he afterwards was hunted as a beast of prey. The secret of the Lord was in his soul, yet the hand of an enemy was madly against him day and night. The inference of mere reason was obvious,—it was this: “Samuel has deceived me the old prophet has mistaken me for another man; and now through his blunder I am exposed to intolerable vexations and injuries: had God chosen me, he would have set me on a high mountain, where no evil hand could have reached me, or hidden me in a defence far away from the storm.” This reasoning, as a mere intellectual effort, would have been sound and unanswerable. Yet David never uttered words so reproachful and distrustful. He accepted his ill-fortune in a spirit of

wisdom, and went in and out before his enemy with a circum-spection more terrible than anger. "Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him." Saul himself could see the divine presence. There is an indefinable something about elect men which guards them without display, and announces them without ostentation.

Let us gather what instruction and comfort we can from a study of the severe discipline which David underwent immediately after victory. Remembering the undoubted anointing of David, let us see what untoward and heart-breaking experiences may befall men whom God has sealed as the special objects of his favour and the high ministers of his empire. Given, a man called of God to a great work, and qualified for its execution, to find the providences which will distinguish his course. A child might answer the easy problem: His career will be brilliant; his path will be lined with choice flowers; he will be courted, blessed, honoured on every hand. Look at the history of David for a contradiction of this answer. We shall find persecution, hatred, difficulty, hunger, cold, loneliness, danger upon danger; yet he who endures them all is an anointed man—a favourite of Heaven.

The history shows four things respecting the discipline of an anointed man:—

1. That great honours are often followed by great trials.—The graciousness of this arrangement in human training. These trials not to be looked at in themselves but in their relation to the honours which went before. Imagine a garden discussing the year as if it were all winter. Look at the temptation assailing David in the fact that he alone had slain the enemy of Israel. Something was needed on the other side to chasten his feeling. Men must be taught their weakness as well as their power.

2. That great trials generally bring unexpected alleviations.—"The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul." "Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and

gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword and to his bow and to his girdle." The love of one true soul may keep us from despair. Love is fertile and energetic in device. See what Jonathan did. Love is more than a match for mere power. Love is most valued under such circumstances as David's. "There is a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother."

3. That no outward trials can compare in severity with the self-torment of wicked men.—We are apt to think that Saul did all the mischief, and David suffered it. That is an incomplete view of the case. Saul was himself the victim of the cruellest torment. When the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music, they said, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Then there entered into Saul the cruellest of all infernal spirits, the spirit of jealousy. "Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward." And truly, even in suffering, Saul had the worst of it. See how unjust is jealousy,—the great work of David undervalued. Saul was the slave of jealousy, and as such all his peace was destroyed. There was bitterness in his wine; the charm of sleep had perished; the bloom of summer had faded; there was a cruel serpent gnawing at his heart. "The way of transgressors is hard." Let us not suppose that unjust opposition or enmity has an easy life. Better be the martyr than the persecutor, the oppressed than the oppressor. Read Saul's inner life,—anger, envy, madness, murder, evil scheming, chagrin,—hell!

4. That great trials, though calling for self-scrutiny, may not call for self-accusation.—This is a point which should be put with great delicacy, because we are too apt to exempt ourselves from self-reproach. David would be utterly at a loss to account for his treatment so far as his own behaviour was concerned; for he had the distinct consciousness that God was with him: and as to his outward relations, it is upon record that "David behaved himself wisely in all his ways," and that Saul was afraid of him because of the wisdom of his behaviour.

The question which the tried man generally asks himself is, What have I done? Days of misery have been spent in brooding over that inquiry. The question is only good so far as it goes. It should be succeeded by another—What is God doing? Imagine the silver in the refining fire asking, What have I done? not knowing that it is being prepared to adorn the table of a king! Imagine the field asking, What have I done, that the plough should cut me up? We are strong only so far as we see a divine purpose in the discipline of our life. “Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.” “Let patience have her perfect work.” We are polished by sharp friction. We are refined by divine fire. Sorrow gives the deepest and sweetest tone to our sympathy. We should be driven mad by uninterrupted, ever-augmenting prosperity. Over every jealous soul the hand of the Lord is omnipotent. Look at Saul, and the case of David is hopeless; look beyond him, and see how by a way that he knew not the shepherd was being trained to be mighty among kings, and chief of all who sing the praises of God.

SELECTED NOTE.

“*And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*” (v. 7).—This is quite characteristic of the manners of the East. Everywhere in that part of the world the people are accustomed in this manner to hail the arrival of those who have been any time absent from them. More especially do they do so on the return of a victorious army. Multitudes then issue from the towns and villages through which they are expected to march, in order to form a triumphal procession to celebrate their valour, the principal part being composed of women and children, who band together, and, as they go along, gratify the heroes with dancing, music, and songs in honour of their martial deeds, particularly of such of the chiefs as have greatly distinguished themselves. We find this custom in Persia, Turkey, etc. Mr. Campbell, the missionary, witnessed it even in Africa. When he was leaving the city of Lattakoo, he fell in with a party of men who were returning from a distant expedition, after an absence of several months. The news of their approach had reached the town, and the women were hastening to meet them. On joining the party the females marched at their head, clapping their hands and singing with all their might, till they arrived at their homes in the town.

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